Addicted to *The Big Book*:

Language, Identity & Discourse

in the Literacy Practices of Alcoholics Anonymous

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved April 2013 by the
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ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2013

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the literacy practices of three members of Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) and to explore how they use these practices to support and maintain their recovery in their lives. This study also aims to examine how each participant used specialist language, enacted certain identities and acquired the secondary Discourse in A.A. through literacy use. This dissertation study is the result of in-depth interviewing in which each participant was interviewed three times for 90-minutes. These interviews were then transcribed and analyzed using discourse analysis.

Study results are presented in three chapters, each one designated to one of the participants. Within these chapters is a life history (chronology) of the participant leading up to the point in which they got sober. The chapters also include a thematic discourse analysis of the interview transcripts across themes of literacy practice and topics in A.A. A conclusion is then presented to investigate how literacy was used from a sociocultural perspective in the study.

Due to the emotionally charged nature of this dissertation, it has been formatted to present the stories of the participants first, leaving the theoretical framework, literature review and research methods to be included as appendices to the main text.

DEDICATION

To my dear friends at my local Alano Club who have been there for me from day one of my sobriety and every day after: Thank you for carrying the message when I needed it the most. I am still sober today because of you.

Keep coming back.

To my husband, Jason, whom I will forever believe saved my life: Thank you for taking a chance on me, and for loving me through it all. My love for you is immeasurable.

This one's for you.

To my parents, Greg and Doris, who never stopped believing in me, even when I made it hard for them to do so: My life is a miracle because you always believed it would be.

Thank you. I love you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In March of 2010, I sat down to tell my adviser, Dr. Josephine Marsh, that I was an alcoholic. After dropping what I thought was a bombshell on her, she just calmly looked at me and said, “Write about it.” In many ways, that meeting was the first step to the topic of this dissertation study. Josephine, thank you for never judging me based on my identity as an alcoholic. Thank you for embracing it, loving me, and seeing the good it could do me in this journey. You taught me to believe in this research and the impact it could have on others. The personal nature of this study helped us to build a relationship that I think few PhD students ever have with their advisers. It is for that relationship, and friendship, that I will forever be grateful.

To Dr. Betty Hayes, thank you for teaching me to think outside the box, even if that did include playing World of Warcraft for a semester (ok, ok, I still play!). I learned so much in your classes about how literacy is crafted in the world around me, and I am so honored to have had you on my dissertation committee

Thank you to Dr. Frank Serafini for letting me geek out on fonts and typography. It was an awesome experience to write and publish with you. You let me return to my roots as a graphic designer, even if only for a little while. You’ve been a huge part of this journey for me, and I am grateful to have had you on my committee.

Thank you to three of my professors Dr. Jim Gee, Dr. Charlotte Frambaugh-Kritzer and Dr. Alice Daer. Charlotte and Alice, you who were among the few people I told I was an alcoholic early on in my sobriety. You, like Josephine, never judged me or

made me feel less than. Instead, you made me feel talented and loved, and you pushed me to be a better person and a better student. Dr. Gee, thank you for always making time to meet with me about this study and for providing such brilliant insight into my topic. Your work is the foundation I built my research on, and I appreciate you being so accessible to answer all my questions.

To my best friends and fellow PhD students Amanda Gordenstein and Lettice Pelotte. I'm not sure I can put into words how much each of you has impacted me over the past four years or how much you mean to me. You were my first friends in sobriety, and I love you both so much. Thank you for persuading me to take a risk when I questioned whether writing about A.A. was going to be a good idea. You are two of the most brilliant women I know I am so proud to call you my friends.

Thanks to all my friends at ASU who are current and past PhD students including Daisy Fredericks, Maryellen Ohrnberger, Man-Chiu Charlene, Sarah Newcomer, Jayne Lammers, Ayfer Gokalp. John Carter McKnight and David Krauter. I have loved sharing advice, coffee, laughter and tears with you over the past four years. Each of you impacted me in some way throughout this journey and I am certain I would have never gotten this done without all of you.

Thank you to my husband, Jason, who saved me from myself when I thought I had nothing left to live for. Thank you for being right by my side and walking this journey with me. You were so patient when I needed bounce my ideas off of you, and your sometimes brutal honesty always had me questioning the best way to approach the

topic of this study. You are truly a remarkable man. I don't know how I got so lucky, but I plan to spend the rest of my life showing you how grateful I am to call you my own.

To my mom and dad, who are my two biggest fans, thank you for loving me through it all. I am sure that day in May four years ago was one of the hardest ever for you as parents, and I hope you know that everything I do today, including this dissertation, is my way of thanking you for being there that day and every day after. You will never know how much your love and support have meant to me. This is all possible because you taught me to follow my heart.

To my family: my brothers Geoff and Tim and their wives Laura and Megan, thank you for being there for me through this journey, and always believing I could do it. I also want to say thank you to my fabulous nieces and nephews Isabel, Gabe, Luke, Helen, Ani and Julia for always providing the comic relief I needed just when I needed it. And a special shout out goes to my two cats Rex and Gonzo, who were the ultimate writing partners as they always sat within a very close proximity to me while I was writing, and followed me around anxiously when I tried to take a break.

To the participants of this study, Robert, Fred and Janis. Thank you for being so willing to share your entire life story with me. None of this would have been possible without you, and I don't just mean this study. You have each played a role in my own sobriety and I will never forget all that I have learned from you.

Finally, I have to thank my higher power, without whom none of this would have been possible, including the gift of sobriety. This is all a result of His will, not mine.

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INTRODUCTION

The fluorescent lights above penetrated my eyelids as I started to come around. I blinked them open in an attempt to adjust to the brightness. I suddenly became acutely aware that I was not at home and felt a wave of panic and anxiety sweep over me. I scanned the room to try and place my surroundings. I didn't recognize anything, and the terror of having no idea where I was began to creep over me. My eyes jetted to a small window to my left, but I couldn't make out anything on the other side. The walls were painted a stark white and nothing decorative stood out— no pictures, no wallpaper, nothing. It smelled like a mixture of hand sanitizer and stale food, and I suddenly felt nauseous. Once my eyes focused, I noticed all of the machines I was hooked up to. I looked down to see an IV poking out of the vein on my hand, but I couldn't remember it being put there. I blinked again. I looked to my right, and my eyes landed on my mom and dad. I didn't remember calling them and grew curious as to how they got there. My father rose at the movement of my legs and stood at the end of the hospital bed I now realized I was lying in. My mother moved to the edge of her seat and put her hand on my leg. They looked tired and worried, but more than that, they looked scared. Neither of them said anything, as if they were waiting for me to remember. I shifted my weight under the heavy hospital blankets as I tried to remember how I had gotten there. Sudden flashes of the police came to mind as I remembered getting arrested for driving under the influence. Had I hurt someone? Was I hurt? I moved a little more in the bed to assess the damage. I didn't feel any pain, and although the sparks of memories I was having were

blurred and foggy, I remembered being pulled *over* by the police, not pulled *out* of some wreckage by an EMT. I knew that wouldn't have put me in the hospital, so why was I here? I returned to the look on my parents' faces. It was only a split second, but it felt like an eternity as their expressions helped me recall the events of the night before. Their worry and fear took me back to how heavy that empty bottle of pills had felt in my hand after I had taken them all. It made me remember getting to my boyfriend Jason's apartment, and it made me remember him calling 9-1-1. I could see the ambulance now, and the EMT's, and I could see Jason standing there in tears as I begged him to come with me. "You have to do this yourself," he said. "I can't help you get better." I returned again to the present and to my parents arranged in this strange hospital room and I began to cry. I knew at that moment that I would never drink again. I knew, without reserve, that I was an alcoholic and that I would go to any length to get sober.

Most people don't get a PhD because they are out of options in life. I did. I have always been an alcoholic, even before I drank, but the funny thing is, I didn't call myself that until I finally put down the glass. I knew that if I admitted to being an alcoholic, I would have to quit, and for a long, long time I wasn't ready to do that. And so my disease –and yes, alcoholism is a disease-progressed right along. I drank away everything that was important to me. My best friends just couldn't bear to pick me up off the barroom floor one more time, and so they didn't. Shortly after that, they stopped calling altogether. Who could blame them though? I was the one whose hair they had to hold. I was the one who would spout off obscenities the minute they tried to take the drink out of my hand. I was the one who, on more occasions than I'd like to recall, had become violent. My

family had grown hopeless, not knowing how bad the drinking had truly become. My brothers used to say, “that’s just Jennie” and try to ignore my behavior when I was yet again embarrassing them and their families. For them, it finally got to the point where they weren’t comfortable having me around their children. I was too obscene, too violent, and too unpredictable to trust.

And so I began the lonely, desolate journey of my last year out. That’s what we call it in Alcoholics Anonymous, because when we are drinking, there is no denying that’s what we are— out of self; out of control; out of money; and, in too many cases to count, out of time. I spent my last year out in a fog. I drank every single day, like many alcoholics do, and the day before I got sober I had consumed more than one bottle of vodka in a twenty-four hour span. For a five-foot-five-inch one hundred and forty pound girl this may seem shocking. Shocking? No. Normal. That was my version of normal. Through all this, I continued going to my job as a high school teacher, but my abilities as such had begun to falter. I was no longer the vibrant young teacher I had been four years before. I was sick and run down and angry. Angry at what, I can’t say exactly. Perhaps I knew that I wasn’t normal by society’s standards and I thought that was unfair. Or perhaps I was irritated at the fact that going to work every day meant I couldn’t drink in the morning, also unfair. Whatever it was, I was a shell of my former self. I went from loving my job and leaping out of bed every morning to get to it, to hating the idea of being there and thinking only about the end of the day when I could get to the bar. For an alcoholic, anything that gets in the way of our addiction is worth losing, and for me that included my teaching career.

Halfway through my fourth year of teaching, I chose to resign from my teaching position rather than face termination for alcohol-related reasons. All I had ever wanted to do, since I was old enough to say it out loud, was be a teacher, and now it was gone. Without teaching, and with a sizeable severance package from the district I taught in, my life became a tornado. Here I was, a 27 year-old college-educated woman from an upper-middle class family who had been given everything in life, who had never struggled, and who was spending every moment of her life focused on alcohol. I would drink until I threw up blood and wake up swearing I would never drink again only to be back at it a mere few hours later. I got kicked out of restaurants, drank away every last dime I had, and made friends only with people who I thought were worse drinkers than I was. I tried dating to fill my jobless time, but couldn't remember each of them well enough the next day to make any real connections.

The exception to that rule was one man who told me only thirteen days after we met that I was an alcoholic. Jason was the first person to ever say it to my face, out loud. Instead of taking that as a sign, I took it as an insult that I wasn't doing a good enough job of hiding it, so I tried harder. It would be Jason who, five months later, when my attempts at secrecy had become vain, and after I had been arrested for DUI, would leave me, clinging only to the hope that his leaving would force me to realize I needed help. I was left with nothing. I had no job, my family didn't trust me, friends were an anomaly, Jason was gone and I knew I was going to jail for my DUI. I was overtaken by the notion that I had nothing left to live for, and with all the hopelessness and desperation that such an act takes, I made an attempt on my own life.

That moment in the ICU when I woke up and saw the pain and anguish on my parents' face, I knew in *that* moment, my life would never be the same. For some reason, I had just a tiny sliver of hope that maybe it would be *better*. I admitted for the first time that day that I was an alcoholic. It was May 8, 2009, and I have been sober ever since.

Where does a teacher who has lost their job, a person who has lost everything, go to rebuild? Back to school, of course. At roughly sixty days sober, I was accepted into my PhD program at Arizona State University. I was out of options, and this was my second chance.

I didn't begin my PhD program expecting to write about Alcoholics Anonymous. In fact, in the beginning I worked very hard to keep the two separate. I was so afraid of what people would think and how I might be judged by others because I was an alcoholic. Yet the longer I was sober, the more aware I became of how lucky I was to be educated, and in many ways, literate. In rehab, when they thrust *The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous* into my hand, I knew how to read and comprehend what they were giving me. I knew how to interpret and apply the principles of recovery that I read about in that book to my own life and sobriety. When they had me fill out page after page of a packet describing my first step (admitting I was powerless over alcohol and that my life had become unmanageable), I knew how expository writing should sound and look (see Figure 1 for the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous). I was able to write reflectively about my own experiences because I had developed literacy practices that allowed me to do so. Being literate, I was able to use my knowledge of language and comprehension to apply the new information I was being inundated with in a different

context, in this case, sobriety. As I began to negotiate what it meant to be sober (as opposed to what it means to just not drink- they are not the same), I found myself using literacy as a sociocultural practice. I was applying my already existent values, beliefs and recurring social practices, in the way I interacted with others through listening, speaking, reading and writing to gain knowledge, make meaning and make decisions specific to getting sober in various settings. I hadn't done a lot of things in a long time without drinking, so even small tasks like going to sleep at night or going to the grocery store were laborious and foreign in early sobriety. I had to adapt my habits to live like a non-drinking alcoholic, and this required a lot of learning, and a lot of literacy. In A.A. meetings, I became acutely aware of the literacy practices taking place around me as I watched people—men, women, young, old, successful or vagrant—reading aloud, writing in journals, listening with purpose, and speaking from the heart. It was a deluge of literacy practice that had been left virtually untapped by academia, researchers and mainstream society.

I understand that A.A. is a program of anonymity. But because of anonymity, there is something happening in Alcoholics Anonymous that is going completely unnoticed because it appears to some as a semi-secret society. Few scholars want to try and do research in A.A. because the anonymity factor is so imperative, and even if they could get access, the amount of bellicosity they would potentially be met with by members of A.A. would be enough to destroy their research design. Because of this, few are paying attention to the intricate social and cultural literacy practices that invisibly swirl through thousands of A.A. meetings every day. People are reading, and writing, and

listening, and speaking, and on and on I could go about the constant exhibition of literacy practice that takes place in A.A. meetings across the world by the thousands. They read for purpose, so much so that some of them claim *The Big Book* saved their life. They listen with intent, because for some it was the first time in their life they truly heard something that made them want to live a different, sober life. They journal by the page, documenting their sobriety and reflecting on their writing to see how they have grown over time. They quote verbatim from the *Big Book*, some of them having the entire text memorized. The Traditions of A.A. say it is a program of "attraction rather than promotion," but part of what I have found so attractive about being in A.A. is that I have been surrounded by brilliance on a daily basis (Wilson, 1952, p. 180) (see Figure 2 for a list of the Twelve Traditions). It is this untapped wisdom that has led me to make the choice to break my own anonymity. By admitting to the world that I am an alcoholic, I am sharing the devastating story of a former high school teacher who lost everything, and showing how this loss turned into an amazing opportunity to share the genius of the rooms of Alcoholics Anonymous and how the literacy practice therein is keeping people alive. My name is Jennie and I am an alcoholic. Literacy practice in Alcoholics Anonymous saved my life. This dissertation tells the stories of my friends in recovery and how literacy practice saved *their* lives.

* * * * *

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, I hope to illuminate the use of literacy in A.A. to expand the field of literacy research particularly from a sociocultural

perspective. Currently there is no documented research on literacy use in Alcoholics Anonymous. There is some work written about the ways in which alcoholics enact various identities within A.A. like sponsor, speaker or newcomer, but nothing has been written about how literacy impacts this identity positioning. Instead, what most of the literature provides is a mere telling of the process a person might go through in order to internalize each of these identities and what that entails within the program of A.A. Communities of practice are also lightly touched on in relation to A.A., but again not with a specific focus on literacy. The concept of storytelling in A.A., however, has been written about (See Appendix A). The identity of the storyteller is one of a person who knows what it was like to be a drinking alcoholic, what it took to get sober, and how their life has improved because of their sobriety. This also means the storyteller has the ability to communicate and pass on what they deem valuable about their own story in order to relate to other alcoholics. This storytelling, and the very act of speaking to a group of alcoholics who are listening, is based in literacy practice. Therefore, it is impossible to ignore the importance of developing research in the area of literacy as it is related to A.A. It is a setting rich with literacy practice that has been mostly untouched by researchers.

The second purpose of this dissertation is to aid the community of recovery. It is my greatest hope that this dissertation will not only build the field of literacy research, but will also help those seeking recovery to see how their own literacy use can assist them in getting sober. By telling the stories of three alcoholics in recovery, I hope to show others how literacy can be used as a method for achieving and living a sober life using the program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

What is Alcoholism and Who is the Alcoholic?

In order to create common ground among readers, it is important to clarify what I mean when I use the term alcoholism or alcoholic. First, the term is inherently American. In many countries across the world, alcoholism does not exist simply because cultural differences of what is deemed appropriate drinking prevent it from becoming a social issue. In places where excessive alcohol use is a part of the cultural norm, alcoholism has little place. In the United States, however, it carries a cultural stigma and is even considered an illness. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention alcoholism is defined as "…a chronic disease. The signs and symptoms of alcohol dependence include a strong craving for alcohol, continued use despite repeated physical, psychological, or interpersonal problems, and the inability to limit drinking" ("Alcohol and Public Health," 2012). Therefore, anyone who suffers from these symptoms would be diagnosed as an alcoholic. This definition somewhat aligns with the perspective of what those in A.A. are taught to believe about alcoholism, and thus what I believe: it is a progressive, fatal, genetic, and incurable disease.

However, the way one is classified as an alcoholic in A.A. is different from how the CDC sees alcoholism. Holland et al (1998) note that "A.A. has constructed a particular interpretation of what it means to be an alcoholic, what typical alcoholics are like and what kinds of incidents mark the typical alcoholic's life" (p. 66). It is assumed in A.A. that in order for someone to get sober (and therefore be labeled as an alcoholic), they have to have reached some kind of bottom. For some, this is as simple as the realization that they cannot control their drinking. For others, there are much more dire

consequences including job loss, prison, family issues and physical illness. “Hitting bottom is a point of crisis in the drinker’s life. It is a point at which life cannot go on as it has” (Holland et al, 1998, p. 70). No two alcoholics’ bottoms are the same, and the varying degrees of what it takes for a person to categorize him or herself as an alcoholic relies solely on the alcoholic. Therefore, it is important to note how each of the participants in this study classify themselves as alcoholics. Their stories up to the point in which they get sober have been written as a chronology to give the reader a glimpse into what life was like for each participant before they got sober. This exemplifies the concept of variations in bottoms in A.A. Each of them has very different stories and reasons for identifying as alcoholics. It is a term they have used to label their own manner of living, not a label I have assigned them. In A.A., no one can truly label an alcoholic as such until the alcoholic believes so him or herself.

To aid in the reader’s understanding of what A.A. is, there will be various graphic interludes throughout the chapters which detail and explain different components of A.A. These will include the Twelve Steps, The Twelve Traditions, The Twelve Promises and The Twelve Principles of A.A. This is intended to inform the reader of specific mechanisms within A.A. of which the participants of this study discussed in their interviews so the reader can better understand the context from which the participants speak.

Format and Analysis

The format of this dissertation is non-traditional (See Appendix C for a detailed description). Rather than beginning with a literature review, theoretical framework and

research method, those sections have been placed in the appendix of the text. This was done to create a dissertation that placed more emphasis on the stories of the participants of this study. They are the lifeblood of this research, and the reader must become familiar with their experiences in order to comprehend the research methods and theoretical framework with the most amount of meaning.

The body of this piece is divided into five chapters: an introduction (which you are reading here), Robert's story, Fred's story, Janis' story and a conclusion. Each person's story has been written in a unique format to explore their life-history (chronology) and literacy use in sobriety from their own perspective. The mentor text guiding this format is Patty Lather's *Troubling the Angels* (1997). Lather's work in support groups for women struggling with HIV/AIDS is broken down in a way that allows the reader to see not only the researcher's perspective in an analysis of the data, but also to hear the stories of the women in the HIV/AIDS support groups in their own speech. This was done in "an effort to include many voices and to offer various levels of knowing and thinking through which the reader can make their own sense" (Lather, 1997). Modeled after this alternative format, each story has been divided into four parts. First, an introduction to the participant is included to give background information about them and how I, the researcher, know them through A.A. For each of the participants, I have also included how I interpreted their volunteering for the study in different ways. In other words, I share whether their participation surprised me or if it was something I expected based on my already existent relationship with each of them.

The second portion of each chapter is a life history of each participant. Referring to Chase (2008), Kouritizin (1999), and Shopes (2011) as guides for recounting life histories, this portion is a retelling of the life events of each person leading up to the moment when they get sober. This is a chronological sorting out of their story from their earliest memory to their last recollection before getting sober. I chose not to term this portion of each chapter as a narrative, because I offer no analysis as the author. While I acknowledge that I selected details of each story, my authoritative voice is void from the story. I do not attempt to interpret why they recalled certain things over others, rather, I merely relate to the reader the events of each participant's life verbatim as they were told to me during the interviews.

The third section of each chapter switches from my version of their story to their own first-person account of literacy use in A.A. Using the transcripts from the three interviews I conducted with each interviewee, this portion of each chapter includes the participants' first moment of sobriety and their most prominent use of literacy since then. This is unique in that the transcripts, following Lather's format, were pieced together "for purposes of theme development [and] dramatic flow" (Lather, 1997). To prevent the data from being skewed based on what I deemed important versus what actually was important, this step of compiling transcripts could not be accomplished until I had completed a discourse analysis of each of the interviews, identifying pieces that highlighted my research questions. My goal was to determine what information within the interviews showed how the participants positioned themselves within A.A. I wanted to explore the identities they assigned themselves, particularly those that were derived

from literacy practice. For example, a participant who spoke of being told by their sponsor to read *The Big Book* was enacting the identity of a sponsee in the way they interacted with the text of the program. I also wanted to know what kind of language they used when discussing literacy and whether or not the literacy was situated with the program of A.A. In other words, I wanted to discover how the participants used terminology specific to the program of A.A. and how their language use was built on the social conventions of the culture in A.A. These conventions and culture were also a part of the Discourse of A.A., another topic I was interested in exploring in the data. I wanted to investigate what behaviors, language and values they deemed significant and how their behaviors expressed this in the Discourse of which they were a part.

Following this discourse analysis, the transcripts of the interviews were then dissected based on what Gee's (2011) tools had revealed as important data. Each participant referenced listening, speaking, reading and writing in their interviews with listening and speaking being mentioned the most and least often, respectively. They each had one practice that emerged more commonly and more significantly than the other practices. Robert's data revealed that listening was crucial when he came into the program. Fred's interviews showed that reading was the key to his sobriety. Janis had spent much of her first year writing, and it had thus impacted her recovery greatly. The data about these specific literacy practices were then reassembled thematically for further analysis to give each participant one theme that exemplified their most commonly used literacy practice. This was done in a way in which the data told the best story and thus followed Lather's model of theme development and dramatic flow. This meant that if a

participant said something in the third interview that was similar or tied to something they said in the first interview, the two pieces were combined to exemplify the participant's beliefs on that particular topic. Therefore, each theme for each participant is a categorical piecing together of all three interviews to share the most important details of their literacy practice in A.A.

The final portion of each chapter is a discussion of the participants' themes, highlighting the ways they each used literacy to enact identity, use specialist language and become members of the Discourse community of A.A. This section serves two purposes. First, this is an examination of the data I collected through my interviews with the participants based on what the discourse analysis revealed. Second, this section of each chapter has been written with the intention that anyone seeking recovery can comprehend and find value in this information and potentially use it to strengthen, maintain or begin their own life in recovery.

Literacy Practice and Literacy from a Sociocultural Perspective

Literacy practice is much more than the way a person reads and writes. Assuming that making meaning out of different types of material is a way of becoming literate in a given topic, then literacy practice would also include behaviors like speaking, viewing and listening. In both acts, one interprets the information one is exposed to in an effort to comprehend it for a specific purpose, thus displaying a form of literacy practice outside of just reading and writing. Therefore, literacy practice in this study describes the participants' use of listening, speaking, reading *and* writing as each is relevant to their membership in A.A. While viewing is also an important part of literacy practice, it is not

a part of this study because it was not mentioned by any of the participants. Each literacy practice in A.A. is based on certain constructs of the community itself. For example, *The Big Book* exists because of the community of A.A. It has a cultural attachment to the program and would not exist without it. Thus, when participants speak about *The Big Book* they are speaking of a text that exists because of A.A., not the other way around. By listening to old-timers in A.A., a person can learn the discourse of the program. By speaking at an A.A. meeting. and sharing their own story, a person makes sense of their own history and how it applies to what is appropriate in that context. Each of these are a way of showing how a person is literate in the context of A.A.

It is also true that literacy is often looked at from a social and cultural perspective. Studies on literacy practices now involve the way people function in the many different facets of their lives—school, work, family, online, in sports, religion, ethnic practice, etc. Drawing from various scholars, I have developed my own definition of literacy from the sociocultural perspective for the purpose of this study (See Appendix A for more information about literacy from a sociocultural perspective). To me, this encompasses the way an individual uses listening, speaking, reading and writing, to express their values, beliefs and identities in their interactions with others in order to gain knowledge, communicate, interpret, and make decisions specific to the social and cultural contexts of Alcoholics Anonymous. This is especially relevant to this study because of the ways the participants use literacy to negotiate their own sobriety and what being sober means to them.

Social Setting and Context

As indicated previously, the specific social setting that is addressed in this dissertation is Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.). Before explaining the ins-and-outs of an A.A. meeting, I must make it clear that this is just one program of recovery for alcoholics. This paper is not written in an effort to endorse A.A. as *the* solution to alcoholism, nor does it mean to suppress other methodologies of recovery. As an insider in A.A., meaning as an alcoholic-in-recovery member of the social group, I make no attempt to appear as an outsider. Some information provided about A.A. is based on my own authentic experience throughout the course of my own four years of sobriety.

In order to provide a frame of reference, it is important to clarify details about the context of A.A. Understanding the protocol for meetings will help the reader relate the ideas of each participant's data that will be discussed in the remainder of this paper to the ways in which literacy practices materializes as a sociocultural practice within Alcoholics Anonymous. To do this, I will break down one A.A. meeting held daily in the Phoenix area, keeping in mind that all meetings differ as to the order in which the following events proceed. The meeting described below is also a meeting which all of the participants of this study attend. Meetings run exactly one hour long. Within the meeting room there are signs that a person is in a space used for A.A. First, the Twelve Steps are displayed somewhere as signage. If the meeting room is a permanent A.A. club, formally called an Alano Club, the sign will generally be affixed to the wall. If the meeting is being held in a rented space like a church, the Twelve Steps will be mobile; they are generally on a roll-out stand which I can only liken to old maps in history classes. In a

permanent club, there will also be other signs, like photographs of the founders of A.A, Dr. Robert Smith (more commonly referred to as "Dr. Bob") and William Wilson (more commonly referred to as Bill W.). One might also see the Twelve Promises and the Twelve Traditions posted as well. The meeting will be started by the chairperson, who is different for every meeting, every day, at every A.A. location. This person will open the meeting with the Serenity Prayer, a mantra that is recited about acceptance. Next, the chairperson will select one person to read Chapter Five: How it Works from the Alcoholics Anonymous *Big Book.* Another person will then read the Twelve Traditions, and yet another person will read the Twelve Promises (See Figures 1, 2 and 3 for a description of these readings). After the introductory readings, each person in the room will introduce themselves, stating their name and their disease (alcoholic, addict, overeater, etc.). After all have been introduced, the chairperson will ask if there are any newcomers (anyone with less than thirty days of sobriety). These people will introduce themselves again, so all in the meeting know to reach out to them. Then, if the meeting is a chip meeting the chairperson will ask for anyone who has thirty, sixty, or ninety days of sobriety, six or nine months, and one year or multiples of years. Each person celebrating an A.A. birthday will get a chip, which is a small plastic or metal token about the size of a poker chip. Finally, the meeting's topic will begin. Topics vary by day, meeting and location. The daily meeting that the participants of this study attend adheres to the following structure: Monday: read from *Daily Reflections*, Tuesday: read from *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions,* Wednesday: pick a Stick (pick a tongue depressor out of coffee can in which each depressor has a topic inscribed on it), Thursday: read

from the *Big Book*, Friday: potpourri about how A.A. is working in the lives of the meeting goers, Saturday and Sunday: speaker meetings. In each of these meetings, a general discussion begins after the activities listed above have been completed. This discussion takes place in several different ways. Some meetings, like the one described above, are called tag meetings in which one person tags another person when they are done sharing. In other meetings you get a raffle ticket when you enter and you speak if your ticket number is called. Some meetings even rely on the chairperson to call on people as the meeting progresses based on whether or not they raise their hand to share. After discussion, the meeting closes with the entire group standing in a large circle at the perimeter of the meeting space, holding hands, and reciting the Lord's Prayer. This entire event repeats itself over and over, day by day, in thousands of locations across the world. In one large southwestern city alone, there are over 1,600 meetings each week.

In an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, there are social and cultural norms. Thus, A.A. has a sociocultural underpinning. There are appropriate ways for greeting one another in AA, and social norms regarding who can work with whom (i.e., typically men take on men as sponsors, and women work with women). There are norms, both cultural and social, about where to sit, when to speak and what to say. There are specific signs and symbols within the meeting space that make the space appropriate for an A.A. meeting, and the ways these are interpreted are again a set of norms for the group. Outside of the meeting space, there are norms for auxiliary membership such as service work, sponsor-sponsee relationships and interactions with A.A. literature. In summary,

the ins and outs of A.A. are all culturally and socially situated and it is a social group that is latent with literacy practice, language and learning.

Research Questions

Gee (2011) writes, "discourse analysts should pick their [research] questions and data because something important bears on the answers they reach" (p. xi). Based on the purpose of my research, I believe my research questions seek answers that are important both in the field of literacy research and also to the commitment of finding tools for recovery for those who need it. Therefore, my research questions are as follows:

1. How is literacy enacted by members in Alcoholics Anonymous?
2. How is literacy used to craft identity in Alcoholics Anonymous?
3. How does literacy impact the lives of members of Alcoholics Anonymous?

THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.

2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

10. Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Figure 1: The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2001, p. 59)

Chapter 2

SIT DOWN, SHUT UP, & LISTEN

Part I: Introduction

By the time I sat down to meet with Robert at our first interview, I had already known him for over three years. I remember him mostly because he was just shy of thirty years sober when I met him for the first time in 2009, and that just seemed impossible to me. At the time, I was struggling to put together a few days without drinking, and this man had not had a sip of alcohol in almost three decades. Now, over three years later, Robert approached me as a volunteer for this study, and I was dumbfounded. As an "oldtimer" in the program, I thought for sure he would be skeptical that my work was breaking one of the traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous (see Figure 2 for a list of The Twelve Traditions). I was wrong. Robert was instead intrigued by the notion of literacy practice in A.A. and what my work could do for others in recovery. He is an older man, at least 75, but despite this, his wit and physical health are still in impeccable shape. His insight into the program of Alcoholics Anonymous is based merely on his own life experiences and one key phrase he learned early in his sobriety: Sit Down, Shut Up and Listen.

Part II: Robert's Life-History

Robert was raised in the Midwestern United States in a small rural community in Illinois called Decatur. Decatur's biggest claim to fame is being the "soy-bean capital of the world". Raised in a strong Irish-Catholic family, alcohol was always present in his life. He didn't know anyone who wasn't an alcoholic and within his immediate family,

this meant a physically and verbally abusive father and an emotionally absentee mother. While Robert has wonderful things to say about how beautiful and petite his mother was, there is little other positive news to report from his experience as a child. “I learned very early how to do a hook slide underneath the bed so I couldn’t get kicked,” he told me. It was the same for his two brothers. He was given his first drink at five-years old during a party with his parents. His father thought it would be funny to get Robert drunk so he would get dizzy and fall down. He also recalls becoming an altar boy as a child so he could save the leftover wine in mason jars until he had enough to get drunk on. “I would drink it and it always gave me something I had never had, I had no idea what that was. It just made me feel good,” he said. Both of his brothers grew to be alcoholics, and so did he.

Robert attended private Catholic schools for all of his education. When he talks about school, most of his memories are of the nuns, whom he refers to as “tough broads.” He never struggled in school, though. In fact, he recalls that most of it came fairly easily to him. He was an avid athlete playing football and basketball from a very young age. He speaks often of how he was always searching for something to get him out of himself; something to make him feel better than he did, and to make him forget what life was like at home. When Robert was 15, between booze and theft, he found just that. “I used to steal things a lot and I’d give them to people because I wanted them to like me and I wanted to be a nice person. So I would give people stuff and I very seldom kept anything for myself,” he said. It wasn’t long before people started to take note of his habits. He was arrested for shoplifting during his sophomore year in high school and rather than face

the juvenile court system, the Catholic Church stepped in and sent him to a reform school for boys in Indiana. It was here that Robert learned how to fight, even winning an amateur boxing championship at age 16. When I asked him if he chose boxing because it was just another sport available at the school, he responded that he chose boxing so he could someday fight his father and make him pay for the abuse he had endured as a little boy. “I hated people who were bullies and hurt other people who couldn’t fight back. I just could not stand it.”

For his senior year in high school, Robert returned to Decatur. Although his reputation preceded him, and he struggled with the ex-con label he had been stamped with, he managed to make it through that year. He found great success as the quarterback of the football team, and even earned a full ride scholarship to the local university. In the summer of 1955, just after his high school graduation, Robert was involved in a devastating car accident which cost him his college football scholarship. It was a friend of Robert’s who had been driving, and Robert admits that both boys had been drinking. “He missed a stop sign, a truck hit us, I went through the windshield and bye-bye football. You know, I drank a lot before then, but this time it was just everything.”

Following his accident, Robert didn’t have many options. He received a phone call from one of his buddies who lived in nearby Chicago. There was a job opening for an insurance underwriter there, and Robert could have the job if he passed a simple test and moved to the city. So he did. He left it all the behind, all the abuse and violence and history and moved to a grownup job in a grownup city.

At twenty years old, Robert began looking into fraudulent insurance claims for the company he worked for. It was a new concept that people would try to deceive the insurance company for money, so when he presented his findings to his boss, he was rewarded with his own department. It was the first fraudulent claims department of any insurance company in the country. It was the opportunity of a lifetime, but Robert couldn't stop drinking long enough to realize it. "I'm 20 years old I got a department in charge of fraudulent claims for the largest insurance company in the world and I can't stay sober," he said. "I would go out and get drunk and I would sleep in my car and when I'd come in in the morning or something I'd take the freight elevator and there were always women coming in earlier, you know, and they would all look at me and they would, they would just, they would look down. They wouldn't look at me in the eye." He received multiple DUIs while he lived in the city (he would incur eleven DUIs total before his drinking days were through) but most of the time he was able to pay off the cops when he got pulled over. "When I was working in [Chicago], everybody had a 10 or 20 dollar bill hooked onto their driver's license," he said. "You get stopped, you just give it to the cop and they didn't give you any tickets." This behavior lasted for several years, until it finally caught up with him at work. Just as he was about to be fired, Robert gave the company his resignation and moved back to Decatur. He continued to work in insurance for several more years, but his drinking was beginning to get out of control. Shortly after moving home, he was involved in a single person accident which resulted in him driving a sedan off a cliff into a lake. He was too drunk to remember any of it.

A year later, Robert began playing quarterback for a semi-professional football league hosted by the local bars in his town. In his first season, the team won its first six games and didn't get a single point scored on them. In his seventh game, Robert got tackled during a pass play and got hit in the groin. When he stripped off his uniform in the locker room after the game, his entire leg from crotch to ankle was black and blue. Despite the advice of his teammates to go to the hospital, Robert instead went to the bar to celebrate another victory. Drinking was the priority of every aspect of his life. The next morning, Robert could hardly manage to get out of bed. He was admitted to the hospital with several massive blood clots in his leg where had been hit. He also suffered a spinal injury, and was diagnosed with a rare form of rheumatoid arthritis called Marie-Strumpell Disease. These injuries cost Robert more than just his football career. He was let go from his job with the insurance agency, and without income he was forced out of his apartment. Robert was in his mid-twenties, unemployed, homeless and disabled. He had nowhere to go, and despite the fact that his abusive father was living there, he moved in with his grandmother. He would soon discover that his father was dying of multiple sclerosis. He was a shell of the man who had beaten Robert and his mother when he was young. He died several years later, and Robert describes being at peace with that. His father's suffering, -- his painful and ill-stricken death—was the revenge Robert had been searching for.

In 1965, Robert decided on a whim to move to Phoenix, AZ. He got a job at a liquor distribution company, where he ran the inventory department on the graveyard shift. It was the perfect job for an alcoholic. He was given an all-access to pass to all the

alcohol he could carry, and because he was in charge of inventory, he was able to juggle things around so it never appeared that anything was missing. He remembers, "I had a pass to get in there anytime day or night, so on Saturdays I would drive down there with my car, empty out my trunk, go in, and load the trunk up with booze. Whatever I wanted. I'd absolutely fill it up." Within the year, Robert was once again faced with the option of being fired or having to quit, so he walked away from his job and moved back to Illinois.

He started working for a stereo distribution company, and was put in charge of the inventory department. For the first time, Robert began to experiment with drugs. "Everybody was using or drinking on the job and uh nobody really said anything as long as the work got done." Robert had no idea what drugs he was taking; all he knew was that he wanted to feel better. He was beginning to hate his life and where he had ended up. Using drugs and alcohol made him feel like it didn't matter. As a result, much of this time in Robert's life is a blur. He has several distinct memories, but mostly what he recalls is that he drank and used drugs every single day. This often landed him in places he didn't know and with people he had never seen before. "I woke up one time, I remember I had a suit on, and I woke up. I was in a bed, [but] I thought I was in a coffin, and I'm looking around. I walked into a room with people at a table eating breakfast and they all said, 'Hey [Robert], how you doing?' I had no idea who these people were." His life was out of control and he recalls that he knew if he stayed in his hometown he would die.

In 1970, he moved back to Phoenix and got a job as a salesperson for a paper distribution company. There is very little Robert remembers about the next decade. He

knows he took trips to Paris and Hawaii, but he has no recollection of either. He was involved in another car accident in 1976 in which he hit a semi-truck head-on and was in such bad shape they had to remove his spleen. “I can remember [the doctor] made an incision and blood just shot out of my stomach,” he recalled. “They took all the stuff out of me and put me back together. My eye was hanging out.” Despite these gruesome details, what Robert remembers the most about that night was how badly he was shaking, and how desperate he was for a drink. He called a buddy who smuggled in some booze and poured it into Robert’s mouth in the hospital. It was not the pain from his wounds or his inability to see that ailed him, it was the discomfort he felt from alcohol withdrawals that he remembers the most.

Although his life was in turmoil because of his drinking, he found some success at his job, and was able to buy a new car and a condominium. It only lasted a short time, though, and in 1980, as a result of his alcoholism, he was told by his company he could choose to resign or be fired. He resigned, as usual, and received a massive severance package which sent him on a bender that lasted for days. “My whole life was based on live fast, die young, and have a good looking corpse. I never thought I’d ever see 50. Ever. Never, you know? And I guess a lot of people that I knew didn’t,” he said. The girl he was living with at the time found him one morning laying in his own vomit and did the only thing she could think to do: She drove him to St. Luke’s Addiction Treatment Center.

Part III: Listening as Power in Recovery

That was the start. I woke up and I was scared to death. I woke up in that bed, and I knew it was over you know? Either I'd do something or I'm gonna be dead and so I started to listen. Maybe I got a chance, I said, maybe I got a chance if I listen to somebody else. Finally. They were telling their stories and every time somebody told a story there wasn't one person that I couldn't identify with [what] they were going through and uh whether it was the physical part or the emotional part and I could feel what they were going through. It was kinda funny back then, they used to sit in front of you and bet that you weren't gonna stay sober and say, "Who the fuck do you think you are? You think you're smart? You don't know anything you fucking smart ass guy from Illinois." And that's the way they talk[ed] to you. If I had not been listening, trying to talk, back then they wouldn't let you talk. They'd say shut up and listen. They just told you if you wanna stay sober you gotta shut your mouth and listen 'cause you're not gonna hear anything if you got your mouth going. That was the key for me because I wanted what they had. They were happy and I wasn't. I wanted to be happy. And the reason why I got lucky was 'cause I listened. I listened to somebody who knew, and I didn't know. That's it. That was the thing. I listened to these guys and every one of them, there wasn't one person that spoke that I couldn't identify with. I am so grateful what those guys told me, they told me truth not some buttered up bullshit. I don't know why I wasn't much of a listener you know. They were telling these stories that they told me it was one of the things that kept me coming back. I would hit coffee shops you know after meetings, and sit there and just listen to those guys. They were telling how they got sober,

how they stayed sober, and it was all that stuff, I mean, I was surrounded by people who had a lot of sobriety. I was around a lot of people who were trying to learn like me. We were going to school again, you know? This was the school of life. We were starting all over. They said, you know, if you listen to us and do it this way, you're gonna be ok. I am so grateful for those old guys sitting in coffee shops 'til one o clock in the morning just listening to those stories. You can become a part of the story. Their version. You've been there before yourself, and that's what I got. They were talking about the steps. They went through the steps. Told you, you needed to do these. And they, all… everybody, and they kept saying ready fashion, and that's what they said to do, don't sit. They told me to do the steps in a ready fashion. Do the steps in a ready fashion 'cause you're gonna be doing them the rest of your life. If you wanna get sober, you gotta do it the way that the program suggests that you do it. And those steps, those 12 steps are answers to any problem you're ever gonna have the rest of your life. They don't tell you, they suggest it and if you wanna get sober that's the reason. And then you would get some information about them, letting you know that they were just like you, you know? They didn't hide anything. Sit down and shut up and listen. They told stories and I listened and I don't think there was one person who spoke that I couldn't identify with something, and that was the main thing. Shut up and listen. I think listening was the biggest part.

Analysis

Language. A.A. is latent with language that is specific to the program. This specialist language is what makes A.A. such a rich environment for literacy practice. Members have to learn the language in order to become participants of the discourse

community. Robert is no stranger to this language. When he spoke about the importance of listening in A.A., he naturally used language that he picked up over his thirty plus years of sobriety.

Listening to the language of oldtimers. In the case of him talking about listening, Robert indicated that there was some other group from whom he was learning in early sobriety. They knew just what to tell him to help him stay sober. Without them, he wouldn't have found the guidance and support that he did in A.A. The appropriate language for these people in A.A. is oldtimers or elder statesmen. The term oldtimer is used in A.A. to describe a person with many years of sobriety who continues to perform 12th step work. Oldtimer and elder statesman are interchangeably used within the program, but oldtimer is used on a more regular, more casual basis. This has to do with Discourse in A.A. (which will be discussed later) and the ways newcomers are taught to use certain specialist language in A.A. Ironically, little is said about the how the oldtimer should be defined in A.A. literature. We know an oldtimer is someone who has "sober for years", but little else is given as a definition. (Wilson, 1952, p. 56). The elder statesman, however, is someone who is described in depth in the *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* in the following way:

> Happily, most of them survive and live to become elder statesmen. They become the real and permanent leadership of A.A. Theirs is the quiet opinion, the sure knowledge and humble example that resolve a crisis. When sorely perplexed, the group inevitably turns to them for advice. They become the voice of the group conscience; in fact, these are the true

> voice of Alcoholics Anonymous. They do not drive by mandate; they lead by example. (Wilson, 1952, p.135)

What this means for Robert's literacy practice is that listening was a hierarchical practice. He was the new member to the discourse community and the oldtimers and elder statesmen were the members of the community that held all the knowledge about how A.A. worked. He says, "They were telling how they got sober, how they stayed sober, and it was all that stuff, I mean, I was surrounded by people who had a lot of sobriety." The transfer of information was happening in a top-down model, allowing a level of apprenticeship to occur between Robert and the oldtimers as he listened (Lave & Wegner, 1991). He says listening to the oldtimers was the key to his sobriety. It was listening, taking advice, and doing what was suggested by the elder statesmen that Robert believes allowed him to stay sober in the beginning, and therefore the long term. Each of them had multiple years of sobriety, although nowhere in A.A. literature is it classified how much sobriety one must achieve in order to be labeled as an oldtimer.

Listening to learn the language of storytelling. Listening to the stories of the oldtimers showed Robert how the program of A.A. worked. He mentioned repeatedly in his interviews how much he felt he could relate to what he was hearing. He was able to connect to the language the oldtimers used in a way that made him feel validated as a member of the group. To him, it was like hearing his own story told in someone else's words. In A.A., this is called qualifying (See Figure 5 for a glossary of terms). Qualifying is when a sober member of A.A. tells what their life was like when they were drinking, what happened that caused them to want to get sober, and what their life is like today as a

sober member of A.A. This process of storytelling is coined as such because it is the alcoholic's way of qualifying for membership within the program. By qualifying, the A.A. member uses the appropriate specialist language they have learned as a member of the community to share their story with others and thus authenticate their membership within the group. Roberts recalls the oldtimers, "telling how they got sober, how they stayed sober, and it was all that stuff." These elder statesmen, through this process of storytelling, were teaching Robert the language of the program. It can also be seen as a rite of passage—a display of how bad things got, what the bottom had to be, in order for a person to get sober. When he was a newcomer in the program, Robert was not equipped to qualify his story because he didn't have any experience in sobriety to share, and he didn't know the specialist language appropriate to for this kind of storytelling. He had to listen to learn the program, begin to understand the language, and do what was suggested by the elder statesmen in order to earn the right to qualify. (I was told by my first sponsor that I couldn't share until after I had a year of sobriety because before then I didn't have anything to teach anyone). As the listener of a person qualifying, though, one becomes witness to 12th step work in action where a person is merely trying to carry the message of A.A. to another alcoholic (see Figure 1 for a list of The Twelve Steps). The message spreads the physical and emotional change that has overcome a person since they got sober and became a member of A.A. As a result of this spiritual awakening the alcoholic has experienced, he or she is now able to carry the message to the newcomer. When Robert says, "They told stories and I listened and I don't think there was one person who spoke that I couldn't identify with something, and that was the main thing" he is talking

about how powerful the stories were for him when he came into A.A. The oldtimers stories, and the language they use within, are intended to connect to the newcomer and show how they have been where they are. He could identify with every single story he heard, and that helped him to connect to the people he met there. Being able to identify with the elders' statements helped put to rest any feelings of doubt about whether or not he was an alcoholic. By listening, he felt that he belonged in A.A. and sensed a feeling of validation for getting sober.

Listening and the Twelve Steps. Every alcoholic completes this step differently. For some, it takes writing pages upon pages of all the wrongs they committed while drinking. Others have only a few paragraphs. Some create a graphic organizer of sorts to organize their thoughts. Many never write down a word of it at all. Either way, this step is a manifesto by the alcoholic who is trying to clear out all of the damage they caused because of alcoholism. The alcoholic is taking what they already know, what behaviors they have already exhibited, and placing new values and beliefs upon them using their newfound knowledge in A.A. They must determine what behaviors are considered to be morally defective and how they will remedy such by being sober. For Robert, he interpreted this to mean that he needed to write down his fourth step, and therefore language played a large role in his completion of this step. He carried that moral inventory around with him for months before he was finally told by his sponsor to throw it away. He did as the book suggested then and he listened to an oldtimer and did what he suggested, knowing that it was okay to discard of that first 4th step because he would surely be doing another one soon. Listening was again pivotal to his progress in the

program (See Figure 1 for a list of The Twelve Steps). This language of carrying the message, a moral inventory, a program of recovery, etc. is evidence of the specialist language that is passed down in A.A. as a result of reading *The Big Book* and listening to the oldtimers. The 12 steps are processes that are to be completed throughout the duration of a person's sobriety "'cause you're gonna be doing them the rest of your life."

Through the literacy practice of listening, Robert acquired the specialist language of A.A. that he needed to become a valued member of the community. Initially, this began because of his relationships with the oldtimers he met when he first came into the program. They taught him the importance of listening which allowed him to identify vital structures of the program like how to share his story. He learned the expressions he would need to share his own story so that he could qualify and complete the 12th step. Over time, listening also taught him the language he would need to complete The Twelve Steps, giving him a solution to "any problem you're ever gonna have the rest of your life." Listening led to language acquisition, which allowed him to become a productive member of the community. This, as he claimed, is what he had to do if he wanted to stay sober.

Identity. Robert is an alcoholic. When he spoke about listening, he positioned himself as such. He also identified as much more than that. He had many socially recognizable identities that he transitioned between, often enacting more than one identity at a time. When he decided to get sober in A.A., he underwent, "much more than a change in behavior. It [was] a transformation of [his] identities, from a drinking non-alcoholic to non-drinking alcoholic, and it affected how [he] viewed and acted in the

world" (Holland et al, 1998, p. 66). As a non-drinking alcoholic, he acquired the identity of a newcomer, and later that of a sponsee. At the time of his interviews, he was also an oldtimer in the program with more than thirty years sober. Mostly though, he was an alcoholic member of A.A. He never said it out loud during his interviews, though; perhaps he felt it didn't need to be said because I was a member of the community from which these identities were derived. This identity of being an alcoholic was the most important one. It allowed him to take on other identities as he tried to do now as an oldtimer what he was taught as a newcomer. Without being an alcoholic, he would not have been able to enact any of the other identities specific to the program.

Being a newcomer and an oldtimer. When Robert shared his story, he rarely spoke about newcomers in the way he was spoken to when he was a newcomer himself. He didn't overtly enact the identity of oldtimer even though he clearly was one. In fact, he rarely discussed what it was like *not* to be a newcomer during his interviews. He continued to reference how it felt to be a newcomer in A.A. thirty years ago rather than what it is like to be an oldtimer today. This identity positioning located Robert as something *other* than an oldtimer in the community. The way he spoke of those oldtimers set him apart from them despite the fact that he certainly had the years to back up the identity of oldtimer during his interviews. He used words like they, them, and their to describe the oldtimers instead of using words like we or us. He did not identify as part of that group, even now with so much sobriety. From his interviews, it appeared this was because Robert was so focused on the listening aspect of his experience early on in A.A. that it would have been contradictory for him to visibly perform both identities at once.

However, this is still an excellent example of Robert enacting more than one identity at a time. Overtly, he forms the identity of a newcomer throughout the interviews, recalling how listening to the oldtimers was "the key" to him getting sober. At the exact same moment as he recalls these memories, though, Robert was also covertly enacting the identity of an oldtimer. With more than thirty years of sobriety, and the understanding that I only had four years, Robert is sharing his story with me in the interview in the same way stories were shared with him. He never ostensibly spoke of being an oldtimer, but all of his behaviors of storytelling combined with the A.A. definition of an elder statesman show that he was, in fact, performing that identity even if done subconsciously. Outwardly he shared how listening identified him as a newcomer. Inwardly he shared his story as an oldtimer under the presumption that I was now the listener. What he valued as his literacy practice was also what formed the foundation of his identities when talking about A.A. He could not value the importance of listening to the oldtimers as a newcomer while overtly being an oldtimer himself.

At 76 years old, Robert never identified as one of those older guys who helped newcomers. In some ways it seemed that he had a bit of an identity crisis between trying to recall and build up what he remembers about listening to the oldtimers. He found motivation to stay sober by listening to their stories. He said, "they just told you if you wanna stay sober you gotta shut your mouth and listen 'cause you're not gonna hear anything if you got your mouth going. That was the key for me because I wanted what they had. They were happy and I wasn't. I wanted to be happy." By listening, he became aware that he was unhappy and they were not. They had long-term sobriety and he did

not. This set him apart from them, facilitating the establishment of his identity as a newcomer and thus locating him within the community of A.A. “In the formation of a new identity an individual comes, with the social encouragement and insistence of others, to interpret the world in new ways, and to position [him]self and emotionally invest [him]self in that world” (Holland et al, 1998, p. 73). Listening to the oldtimers edified which identity was appropriate for him to acquire as a newly sober member of A.A. and allowed him to invest emotionally in his sobriety.

Discourse. All humans have ways of becoming a part of something larger than themselves. Life is not only made by the way we act as individuals, but also by the ways we interact with others. There is no doubt that A.A. is a setting in which people enact these very behaviors. Members of A.A. are alcoholics in their own right, but they are also a part of the whole, a member of the social and cultural group that is A.A. Thirty years later, Robert still recalls many of the things the oldtimers told him when he got sober. They were a pivotal part in his literacy practice because listening to them is what Robert believes kept him sober. He expressed appreciation for oldtimers and his willingness to listen to them consistently through those first few years. It was their honesty that he was grateful for. He easily recalled what specific stories were significant to him, how much he enjoyed the coffee after meetings, and how they taught him to do the steps. The mere context of what he was able to recall in this data at almost 32 years-sober is significant in itself.

A mutual understanding of Discourse. Robert knew during the interview process that I also attended A.A. meetings. Therefore, he used behavior in certain ways in his

interaction with me that only other members of the A.A. Discourse could understand. The ways in which members of A.A. believe certain things, behave in certain ways, and interact with one another on different levels is considered the Discourse of the group. Robert and I, both being members of A.A., had a common knowledge of certain terms, practices and behaviors that were appropriate within the program. In many ways, this was related to language, but, even more so, it marked us as part (participants within the same Discourse community) of the same Discourse. On many occasions during his interviews, Robert spoke to me in ways that validated this relationship. He didn't often need to use specialist language to clarify who or what he was talking about because he knew that I, as a member of the same community, would understand what he was saying. Instead of saying oldtimer or sponsor when he mentioned the men he worked with when he first got sober, he would only say 'they' or 'them,' unconsciously authenticating our membership within the same Discourse. When Robert discussed the concept of sponsorship, he didn't have to go into detail about what a sponsor was or what sponsorship in A.A. meant because I was a member of the same Discourse. This Discourse was also specific to the meeting that Robert and I both attended and could vary from other A.A. meetings across the world. This made our local Discourse even more unambiguous.

The Discourse of storytelling. The stories Robert speaks of so fondly throughout this data set are also a part of the Discourse. He recalled being, "so grateful for those old guys sitting in coffee shops 'til one o clock in the morning just listening to those stories. You can become a part of the story. Their version. You've been there before yourself, and that's what I got." .He did not have to go into depth on what these stories were about

because he knew that I would understand that he was reflecting on how the oldtimers he knew as a newcomer were qualifying to him. The purpose of qualifying in A.A. is to show the newcomer that the current members of the Discourse community are just like them. "A.A. stories provide a set of criteria by which the alcoholic can be identified" (Holland et al, 1998, p. 71). It is an appropriate part of the Discourse to share one's story so as to identify with other members. When Robert talked about identifying with the stories he heard, he was enacting a belief and behavior that was specific to A.A. His belief was that he should value the stories of others in the program. This was a learned behavior. Members of A.A. are taught to listen to the stories of others and find what is relatable to their own story within them. In turn, that member then shares his or her own story knowing that someone else is doing the exact same thing. This Discourse is evident in the fact that half of the *Big Book* is made up of the stories of other recovering alcoholics. It is also evident in the fact that most meetings, especially throughout the large southwestern city in which this study took place, are termed speaker meetings, meaning half of the meeting is spent listening to another member of A.A. share their story. If the book and meetings are not enough, the 12th step of A.A. entails carrying the message to other alcoholics (See Figure 1). If a member of A.A. is to complete all twelve steps of the program, it is required that they share their story. When Robert placed strict emphasis on the stories he heard and the importance of listening to them in his early sobriety, he was merely performing what he valued and believed as a member of the Discourse of A.A. Suffice it to say, then, that his literacy practice of listening in A.A. is a learned behavior, even if he does believe it saved his life.

The Twelve Steps as Discourse. The Twelve Steps, and how one learns to complete them, are also embedded in the Discourse of the A.A. community. Robert built upon the significance of the 12 steps when he said, "…those steps, those 12 steps are answers to any problem you're ever gonna have the rest of your life." It is impossible to quantify every single problem one person could have throughout the duration of their life, and it is quite an assumption to say that the Twelve Steps could solve every single one of them. However, this was what Robert asserted in this statement, placing value on what he believed a member of A.A. got out of working the steps. He made monumental the significance of the Twelve Steps of A.A., and it was clear in his interviews that he learned to place such value on them by listening when he was a newcomer. *The Big Book* says, "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path" (A.A., 2001, p. 58). In the Discourse of A.A., members of the community know that this path is what is laid out before the newcomer by listening to the oldtimer and that it leads to the completion of the Twelve Steps. Throughout the interviews, it was clear that Robert placed immense value on the importance of the Twelve Steps. He relished in the fact that alcoholics must rework the steps over and over for their entire life. He was even willing to go places that he wasn't comfortable going, like the projects, in the name of completing 12^{th} step work. All of these behaviors play into the Discourse of the steps in A.A. Robert, as a member of the social group that makes up A.A., knew that he had to enact certain behaviors and roles in order to maintain his membership within the group. He had to do twelfth step work and go out into the community to help other alcoholics. He had to work with his sponsor to complete the steps. He had to sponsor others to

become their guide through the steps and carry the message. Outside of A.A., these mannerisms would carry little weight by comparison. These behaviors rely on newcomers listening to oldtimers in order to hold any value.

The Discourse of working the program. A.A. members feel the program should be worked in a certain way. I have often heard people say in meeting that if someone would have sat them down and told them all the things they had to do from day one and had given them a list of rules to follow as a newcomer, there is no way they would stayed sober. Part of the Discourse, though, is that no one tells the newly recovering alcoholic what they must do. Robert instructs, "If you wanna get sober, you gotta do it the way that the program suggests that you do it." Everything in A.A. is merely a suggestion. This is founded in the third tradition of A.A. which states, "The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking" (Wilson, 1952, p. 139). If someone were told they *had* to do the steps in one exact way, regardless of their desire to stop drinking, this tradition would be made null. The only requirement to become a member of this Discourse community is to have the *desire* to stop drinking. This tradition doesn't even force the A.A. member to actually quit drinking all together. A common saying is "the steps are *how* it works; the traditions are *why* it works." Others have said, "The traditions protect A.A. from the alcoholics." Members of A.A. only suggest to the newcomer what they should do, and hope, for their sake, they do it. This is part of the Discourse of this community. The only directive Robert was ever given was to listen, and he was told to do so from the very beginning. It was up to him to use what he heard to stay sober and work the program of A.A. The goal of the existing member of A.A. is not to get the newcomer

sober; it is to follow the process that is deemed valuable and appropriate by the rest of the community. If sobriety is a result of this, it does not mean the twelfth step to carry the message has been successful, it means the newcomer listened to the existing member of A.A. and has begun to progress through the steps. This Discourse is founded in the literacy practice of listening. Had Robert not listened to the oldtimers when he came into the program, he might not have learned the appropriate Discourse of A.A. and (might not) would not have become a valued member of the community. Listening allowed him to get a grasp on what he needed to do to get sober, and how to help other on the same journey.

Part IV: Conclusion

For Robert, listening was the most crucial part of his story. He continually reiterated the importance of listening when discussing how crucial the oldtimers were for him. He talked about the importance of listening throughout the process of completing the twelve steps and how much he had to listen in order to learn how to perform twelfth step work. Of all three participants, Robert is the only one who says that he knew he was going to die if he didn't get sober. He shares that he never thought he would live to see 50, and that this was the case for most of his friends. Robert truly believed based on his drinking behavior that he was not going to survive the drink. But, in A.A., this changed. He began to truly believe, based on his non-drinking behavior, that he could live a long and full life. In order to do this, Robert reflected on the overwhelming need he felt to listen for the first time. Through listening, Robert began to adopt the social practices of older members in A.A. He learned how to work the twelve steps, how to perform service

work, how to share at meetings and how to act as a member of A.A. Because of the literacy practice of listening, he gained the knowledge he needed to survive as a non-drinking alcoholic. He took what the oldtimers shared with him, and he applied to his new sober life. He believed he only had the choices of living or dying, and listening was the tool for survival.

Completing the Twelve Steps was a very socially and culturally based practice for Robert. The program required him to have the ability to listen to his sponsor and the oldtimers about how to go through The Twelve Steps. He had to interact with other people in the program in order to gain the knowledge necessary for him to learn how to complete the steps. In a sort of non-traditional way, the other members of the program became the teachers and he the student. They instructed him to work them "in a ready fashion" and not to procrastinate. The steps were a process of literacy for Robert. First he had to listen to the oldtimers, which then led to him reading *The Big* Book and writing out his fourth step. As a result of these literacy-based behaviors, Robert credits the steps with saving his life.

Carrying the message of A.A. was a crucial part of Robert's sobriety. The way he spoke of twelfth step work was very nostalgic. At the time when Robert got sober, everyone was expected to do things like answer the phones at the A.A. office or go on 12^{th} step calls when someone was needed. The idea of rehab was not as prevalent, and the internet was not available to provide information about getting sober. Today a person can find a meeting without ever having to speak to another human being, but it was unlikely someone in 1981 could have done the same thing. Through listening and speaking, he

was able to communicate what he had learned and had begun to value in A.A. so that it could be passed on to someone else. In this way, Robert carried the message of A.A. to perform 12th step work. This was all made possible by the fact that when he came into the program, he did what was suggested: he sat down, shut up, and listened.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon AA unity.

2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.

3. The only requirement for AA membership is a desire to stop drinking.

4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole.

5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers.

6. An AA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the AA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.

7. Every AA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.

9. AA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.

10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the AA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.

11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.

Figure 2: The Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2001, p. 562).

Chapter 3

THE ANSWERS ARE IN THE BOOK

Part I: Introduction

Fred is an easy-going, middle-aged man who values his family and his Midwestern-roots. The most distinguishable thing I remember about listening to Fred in one of my first A.A. meetings was that he was able to quote verbatim from the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. *He would say something really profound about his recovery, and then support it with not only a direct quote, but, in most, cases the page number where he had read it. He did this almost every time he spoke, never once having to flip open the book to check his reference, and most often doing so without even having the book in front of him. It was because of his connection to the book as a resource for recovery that I was elated when he volunteered for the study. Some people in the program call this type of person a "Big Book Thumper," but Fred refuses to tout himself as such. Instead, he reiterates the important role the Big Book has played in his own sobriety and how the text is a solution to any problem he has in his life. His best advice for anyone struggling in recovery? "When you read the book, you'll get your answers."*

Part II: Fred's Life-History

Fred was born in 1956 and raised in a neighborhood called the Near North Side of Chicago. His family lived humbly, often paycheck to paycheck and he defines their place in society as lower-middle class. His father worked overtime, often putting in more than the required forty hours, and consistently worked six days a week. His father's parents were both alcoholics, or "bar flies" as Fred calls them. This resulted in Fred's father

being responsible for much of his own upbringing. Because of this, Fred believes his father never saw an example of what a 'good' father was, and therefore lacked in parenting skills. Fred has an older sister, a younger brother and two younger sisters. With his father's physical and emotional absence, Fred looks back on his childhood as the overlooked middle child. In addition to the five siblings he lived with, his parents also rented out the upstairs flat that was attached to his childhood home. Fred recalls strangers living in their house for most of his youth. Although his parents were never physically abusive, the lack of benevolence they showed for their children left Fred doing whatever he could to just stay under the radar. "I was a rebel without a clue. I had no social skills, no coping skills, and one year that forgotten middle child that nobody pays any attention to anyway just learned to keep to myself. And as long as you can make the play and get the grades, and you'd better get good grades, everybody just left you alone. Which was fine with me, the less I had to do with people the better I liked it."

Fred's mother decided that regardless of the fact that a public school was located directly at the end of the street, the children would get a better education if they attended Catholic school, and so they did. "So we had the public school down here, the house here, and the Catholic school almost mile away, and we had to walk every day," Fred gestured.

Having the school yard close by gave Fred the opportunity to excel at sports. He grew up playing pick-up games of football, baseball and basketball at the school down the street. He got to know a lot of the boys from the neighborhood this way even though he didn't go to school with most of them. However, he doesn't recall ever getting really close to any of them. "As far as actually having friends, you know, I thought I had a

couple of friends down here, you know, it turns out no, that that didn't work out, and I thought I had some friends over here, nope that didn't work out." This all came to a head when he was injured during a football game at the school yard. He got tripped up during the game and hit his head on a telephone pole. When Fred came to, not one single boy helped him or made sure he was ok. No one made sure he got home. When he did finally make it home, his parents took him to the hospital where he stayed for a week. Fred knew then that none of those kids were ever really his friends. He was alone in his family life, and now he was alone in his out-of-home life as well. "The second everything goes south, everybody just goes away," he said.

The following summer on his way home from swimming lessons, Fred got jumped by another boy. He tried to fight back but the boy finally ran off screaming that his dad was a Chicago cop and that he was going to go get him. Moments later, the boy returned with his father in tow. The man held Fred's arms down while the boy slapped him and left Fred with only the warning that if he told anyone about the incident he would come after him. After they left, a vagrant African-American man told him he needed to run home and tell his parents what happened immediately. He raced home to tell his parents, but considering his home situation, little was done. His mother went to the boy's house where the cop denied the entire event. His father did absolutely nothing. The incident would create a memory that would last Fred his entire life. However, in matter of hours after it had happened, it was over as far as his parents were concerned.

Most of what Fred remembers about middle school revolves around the nuns in his Catholic school. He became so terrified of them beating him that he worked hard to

get good grades. In 6th grade, he remembers having a teacher who was such a religious zealot that her teaching style consisted of a God-will-get-you-for-that mentality. In 8th grade, his most vivid memory consists of wearing the wrong color shirt to graduation. "I kept thinking that, you know, why did they have this learning through intimidation thing? You know, what was all that about," he recalled.

In 1970, Fred started high school at the largest all boys public school in the state of Illinois. According to Fred, the school had five-thousand boys enrolled during his freshman year. His father had decided that if Fred was to go to college, he needed to go to a public school. "I'll never forget my father telling me that you know, Fred if you go to a Catholic high school, uh, you probably won't be able to afford to college," he recalled. The cost of Catholic school would have made it difficult for his parent's to help him pay for college. As a result, Fred enrolled at his father's alma mater.

His freshman year in high school, he had just made the baseball team. The year before, the high school's team had won the city championship, and therefore every single boy on the team received one free season ticket to the Chicago Cubs. Fred spent the summer in the bleacher seats of Wrigley Field. That year, Fred got drunk for the first time. "I was 14 when I had my first drunk and for the next 25 years alcohol in all its forms did for me what I could not do for myself. It made me a part of." He recalls getting very sick, but also feeling like he couldn't wait to get drunk again. "I was sitting there playing cards the thought occurred to me that the room would stop spinning if I took just one more drink, you know? That was the first of many trips to the porcelain god. I still remember how cold the bathroom floor was." It was only a matter of time before

marijuana was also introduced, and that was when the word ‘partying’ took on a whole new meaning for Fred.

The following year, Fred got cut from the baseball team. He recalls that it was the first time in his life that he felt like committing suicide. His mother, sensing his distress, tried to reach out to him. But his father, who commanded she leave him alone, overruled her. He finished with an offer for a full ride scholarship to a local college just outside of Chicago. He recalls trying to get his father to help him with the admissions application, but his dad was too busy and tossed the letter about the scholarship aside. Not knowing how to get into the college or how to accept his scholarship, he once again did what his father wanted for him in terms of his schooling and enrolled at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He continued living at home, and as long as he was enrolled in school, he didn’t have to pay room and board to his parents. He had dreams of becoming a computer science engineer, but after three years of taking remedial classes at UIC, he dropped out of college. He couldn’t pass calculus, and therefore couldn’t become an engineer.

He got a job at Sara Lee after that, and for the first time, Fred revealed that drinking and smoking had really begun to affect his life. He worked the night shift Monday through Friday, but got so drunk before he got to work, he couldn’t get out of the car. He remembers passing out in the parking lot and waking up, having never even gone into work. As a result, he got put on probation, but not fired. His drinking behaviors continued and he was eventually placed on double probation. His boss couldn’t fire him, because they couldn’t find anyone else to do the job. Finally, he just decided to quit.

In January of 1981, Fred met the woman who would later become his wife. They moved in together into her basement apartment and were married in 1983. In 1984, they bought a duplex together in a suburb of Chicago, and for several years, Fred was able to juggle his drinking, drugs, wife and job. He was now working for Sears Communications as a customer service representative, where his job included providing support to individual Sears stores for issues with their network.

In 1990, the couple decided to put in for job transfers to Southwestern United States. They just couldn't stand the Midwestern winters anymore. His wife's request got approved, but after months, Fred still had not heard back. He put a call in to a friend of his who worked in the transfer department, and he learned that his request had never been forwarded. He tried to sue Sears over the error, but he lost the case. Soon after, he came to the realization that they were trying to get rid of him. He realized that he just couldn't function anymore because of his drug use, and before the couple moved, he quit smoking pot.

Regardless of the fact that his request for transfer was not approved, they moved to the Southwest anyway. He was unemployed and shortly after the move he learned that his wife was expecting his first child. In an attempt to do the right thing, he finally found a job working in the clean-fab room at Motorola. His schedule required him to work three, twelve-hour days a week, which gave him the freedom to watch his son the other two days. He tried as hard as he could not to drink during the week, but only managed to stay sober while watching his son.

> "After I was done working [I'd realize] that I had drank Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, you know, on Tuesday I would say, 'alright I'm not going to drink until Monday,' and then on Wednesday I would say, 'you know I think I can drink on Sunday I don't see what the problem is,' and then on Thursday I'd say, 'well might as well drink on Saturday.' So I mean literally it was one of those things.

The thought of stopping drinking never occurred to Fred. At one point, his wife suggested he call the Central Office of Alcoholics Anonymous in Phoenix, and he did, but mostly he claimed this was just to get his wife off his back. His behavior continued for three years until he finally got caught for job abandonment. Fred had been leaving his job for over an hour multiple times during the night to go drinking. He got written up, but not fired, and the boss reminded him that she was cutting him a huge break by not letting him go. A couple months later, he got caught again, and this time, there was no escaping the inevitable. He was fired from his job for what were ultimately alcohol-related reasons.

This was the last straw for his wife, who threw him out the house as a result of his job loss. He checked into what he called a "flea-bag motel" and called his parents in Illinois to see if he could go home. They, of course, welcomed him with open arms. His brother made a different suggestion and recommended that Fred go to a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The next day was October 14, 1995, and Fred attended his first A.A. Meeting.

Part III: Reading to become a part of A.A.

I go in, I sit down, and the meeting starts and my terminal uniqueness vanished, you know? I could no longer use the excuse that you didn't know or you didn't understand because you did. The Big Book *is the most important. It's like it says it's the basic text it's the instruction manual it's where it starts. The first 103 pages. These are instructions. If you're asking me, just take those out of the book and just follow them and find someone that's gone through them in this manner and work with them. My sponsor Thomas had me read [page] 84 to the end of the chapter every day. Just read it every day, every day, every day. Read the doctor's opinion, you know, where it says 'the phenomenon of craving' five times and see if it applies to you. Don't have your sponsor read your book for you. Read your own book because everybody is going to get something different out of every passage in the book. So when I'm working with somebody and we're reading out of the book and we get done with a certain section, I'll just look at them and I'll ask, "what does that mean to you?" Let them come to their own conclusion, and then when you get done with it, just tell them, "Look now that you've done the steps you get to take someone through the steps and do it like we did. Step one, you read it then you discuss it. Step two, you read it then you discuss it. There are forty-three pages for step one, which tells you it's important. Everybody reads things differently, and when I try to read what's written, I try to do it as the author has written it. Everybody interprets it a little different and I want to hear other people's interpretation on it because maybe there's something different that I hadn't thought about before. There's something different when somebody reads it even though I'm*

reading along with them while they're saying it out loud. It's the emphasis, the intonation, the inflection in their voice. I just I never looked at it that way before. Whatever your problem is, the answer is in these twelve steps, and these twelve steps are in the book. The answer is in the book all you gotta do is find it. Just grab the book, hold it in both your hands, and then just drop it and wherever it opens up to, just start reading at that point until you get what you need. I mean like it says, it's the instruction manual. I heard someone say this is not a novel to be read and filed away. It's a text to be studied, and every time you study it, you get something different. It's a design for living. It's how you do life, which is something that I had absolutely no clue how to do before I came in here. So if you're willing to follow instructions, you will get the benefits. Just for me, every time I read something in the book, it's like, I swear that wasn't in there before, you know? I always come up across something new, something different or something that I've never even thought of before. It just has so much meaning. I mean, it's just a powerful thing. I realize that there is something that just jumps out at me that I never knew was in there before, and I swear I didn't see it before, and I never heard it before. It's one of those things, to see yourself written by someone else, your uniqueness is gone. Somebody said don't look for the differences, find the similarities. You know, just hold the book in front of you and I just let it fall open and wherever it falls open to, that's where you start reading from. And you keep reading until you get what you need. When I open up the book and I read it and the stories are just amazing- there's some line that just jumps out at you. And it's like ok, I've felt that way. I've gone through that. I know what this person is talking about. When you read the book, you'll get your answers.

Every time I read that book, it looks like they put something new in there. It's like I'm reading it for the first time. I always find the answers. When I start reading the book, I get that sense of calm. When I read the book, and I find that there is a solution and all I have to keep doing is reading, then I'll be ok. I read the big book of Alcoholics Anonymous and they wrote about me.

Analysis

Language. *The Big Book* is the most important text in A.A. It contains information about how the program works, makes suggestions for newcomers, and shares the stories of other people who have found success in recovery through A.A. This text also provides a lot of the specialist language that crafts identity and Discourse in A.A. Fred is very familiar with *The Big Book,* and as a result, is also very well acquainted with the A.A. specific language that is contained therein. He uses this language as second nature to describe the ways he feels about *The Big Book* and how he believes it functions as communication within A.A.

Reading to learn the language of the program. At the beginning of this transcript, Fred references the first 103 pages in *The Big Book.* He calls them the "instructions" and suggests "just take those out of the book and just follow them." What Fred doesn't mention in this suggestion is how much of the specialist language in A.A. is contained in those 103 pages.

This section of the book contains the first seven chapters of the book and includes a description of what alcoholism is, how the program of A.A. works and how a person can get into action in completing the steps. Within these chapters lies language and

phrases that carry specific meaning in A.A. Examples of these includes mantra's like "we have stopped fighting everybody and everything," and "carry this message to other alcoholics" (A.A., 2001, p. 103 and 89). Phrases like these are well-known within the program and carry a lot of meaning, especially when they are repeated during meetings. A person who says they have ceased fighting everything and everyone is actually referencing their level of serenity and peace in sobriety, not a physical altercation. And carrying the message to other alcoholics is the rallying cry of the 12th step which instructs the alcoholic to help others who are in need of recovery. These pages also include the list of The Twelve Steps and how it is suggested a person works them within their recovery and a chapter written for anyone coming into the program who struggles with the concept of finding a higher power (another piece of specialist language in A.A.). The concept of a higher power, which is discussed in detail in the chapter of the book titled *We Agnostics*, the alcoholic is told, "When we became alcoholics, crushed by a self-imposed crisis we could not postpone or evade, we had to fearlessly face the proposition that either God is everything or else he is nothing" (A.A., 2001, p. 53). When Fred mentions the importance of reading the first 103 pages, he references a section where much of the specialist language found in the program is written, including how the concept of God is outlined by the book. This simple phrase carries much more than a mere suggestion of what to read. More so, it is a suggestion for how to work the program of A.A., how to find a higher power in A.A. and how to carry the message to other alcoholics.

In the preface to *The Big Book* titled *The Doctor's Opinion*, Dr. William Silkworth, a Princeton educated physician working at a hospital for addiction and drug

treatment in New York, discusses how the concept of craving alcohol is what sets the alcoholic apart from the normal drinker. He says, "We believe, and so suggested a few years ago, that the action of alcohol on these chronic alcoholics is a manifestation of an allergy; that the phenomenon of craving is limited to this class and never occurs in the average temperate drinker." (A.A., 2001, p. xxviii). When Fred references *The Doctor's Opinion* and "the phenomenon of craving" he again cites a small phrase with a big meaning. For alcoholics, it is this phenomenon of craving that sets them apart from what society deems a normal drinker. When a person has the sensation of craving alcohol, it is said that the disease has been activated in the alcoholic's body and they will never drink like a normal person again. Fred uses this language when talking to the newcomer because he knows that it is what sets the alcoholic apart from normal drinkers. If the newcomer can relate to this sense of craving alcohol, then they can relate to others in the program and feel a sense of belonging. By reading this portion of the book, the newcomer can interpret the language in a way that makes them feel that sense that Fred describes as his "terminal uniqueness" vanishing. Through reading and language, they can become a part of the program.

Reading and sponsorship. For Fred, the relationships he built in A.A. through sponsorship are founded in *The Big Book*. When he talks about sponsorship, he often relates it to what he was specifically told to read when he was a newcomer in the program. These specific passages in the book carry with them language that is explicit to A.A.

Fred's sponsor, Thomas, told him to read page eighty-four of *The Big Book* when he was a newcomer in the program. This page, including a small portion at the bottom of page eighty-three as well, is where The Twelve Promises are first listed. It reads:

> "If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are halfway through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook on life will change. Fear of people and economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us -sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them" (A.A., 2001, p. 83-84).

The language of this passage, while understandable to most anyone, carries with it additional meaning to people who have been in the program for a certain length of time. By Fred citing this page directly during his interview, he made a reference to the promises and how important his sponsor made it for him to learn them. He was told to read these promises every day, which led him to become familiar with the language found within them. As a result, Fred does not have to list off all twelve promises in order

others in the program to understand what he is talking about. He merely needs to cite page 84, and the entire passage quoted above will come to mind for any alcoholic familiar with the book and the promises.

Through the relationship of sponsorship, Fred has also learned how to teach his sponsees the specialist language of A.A. He believed that a sponsor should never tell a sponsee the meaning of anything in the book. Fred makes it clear on several occasions that the sponsee should draw their own conclusions about every passage they read in the book. By doing this, Fred gives his sponsees the opportunity to learn the specialist language of A.A. without him teaching it to them specifically. He never provides a list of definitions or even tells the sponsee what words and phrases are the most important. Instead, the sponsee acquires this information through his or his own exploratory experience with the book. Not only does Fred allow his sponsees to acquire the specialist language of A.A. through their own progression in the program, but he in turn aids them in acquiring the Discourse of A.A. by treating reading and language in this way in sponsorship.

Identity. Identity in A.A. begins to be crafted the moment a person attends their first meeting. Sobriety in A.A. then becomes a transitional practice between all of the identities an alcoholic can maintain within the program. For Fred, this transition included how he went from being a newcomer to a sponsee to a sponsor, and how these identities were not always independent of one another. Often times, they intertwined and impacted one another, and even led to additional identities manifesting in the alcoholic. In Fred's case, the ways in which his identities in A.A. were so linked to *The Big Book* advantaged

him to also enact the identity of a Big Book Thumper. In his sobriety, he has learned to use these identities to become a valued and authentic member of A.A.

Being a sponsor and a sponsee. Fred positioned himself within two identities in A.A. during his interviews. He emerged as both a sponsor and a sponsee when he talked about *The Big Book*. Within these two versions of himself, though, these identities were not exclusive of the each other. He did not have to stop being a sponsee when he became a sponsor. Rather, being a sponsee made him a better sponsor and vice versa. The two identities worked together, changing and influencing each other, impacting both the way he was a sponsor and the way he was a sponsee.

The identity of sponsee was evident in the way Fred spoke about his sponsor and what he was asked to read in early sobriety. "My sponsor Thomas had me read [page] 84 to the end of the chapter every day. Just read it every day, every day, every day," he said. As a sponsee, there was no indication in his interviews that he ever questioned what Thomas was asking him to read. Instead, he respected Thomas' advice because Thomas was his sponsor. This unconditional trust and respect is part of the identity of sponsee. It is an unspoken function of sponsorship as a result of the process of how these relationships are formed. For Fred, this meant reading the same page out of *The Big Book* every single day, and as a result he became very familiar with The Twelve Promises of A.A. which are found on page 84 of the book. This relationship between Fred and Thomas was therefore built on his literacy practice of reading. The two were able to find mutual ground in *The Big Book* in that Thomas knew the book well enough to know what to suggest, and Fred was willing enough to read it because he wanted to stay sober.

Reading the book became the middle ground between the sponsor and the sponsee, and for Fred, this is where he began to develop his love for the text.

The Big Book says a person is ready to become a sponsor when they have completed The Twelve Steps (A.A., 2001). This means there is no time requirement for a person to become a sponsor. They do not need to have a year or five years or ten years of sobriety, they need only to have completed all twelve steps. This means a person with three months of sobriety could be qualified to be a sponsor in the program, which is acceptable considering that even someone who has only three months of sobriety has more time in recovery than someone who has three days.

When Fred completed The Twelve Steps for the first time, he was ready to begin sponsoring. The experiences and practices he had as a sponsee greatly impacted the way he sponsored within the program. He had been taught by Thomas to read page 84 every day. Thomas did not read his book with Fred. He expected Fred to read it on his own every day. Fred communicated the importance of this practice when he spoke about becoming a sponsor. He said,

> "Don't have your sponsor read your book for you. Read your own book because everybody is going to get something different out of every passage in the book. So when I'm working with somebody and we're reading out of the book and we get done with a certain section, I'll just look at them and I'll ask, "what does that mean to you?"

The identity that Fred enacted as a sponsor was centered around what he had been taught about the importance of reading *The Big Book* when he was sponsored. As

indicated by the passage above, Fred was not just interested in what his sponsees were reading, but also how they comprehended the text and what it meant to them. It wasn't just important to Fred that his sponsees merely picked up and read the book every day; he wanted them to feel for the book the way that he did. He wanted it to carry meaning with them. He wanted them to see that they could find something profound in the text. Fred was taught by his sponsor that reading in the program was important and he therefore became a sponsor who translated this to his own sponsees.

Fred also used the book with sponsees who were struggling with the larger identity of alcoholic. As mentioned in the language section of this chapter, he alluded to the "phenomenon of craving" which is mentioned five times in *The Doctor's Opinion.* By using this phrase from the book with his sponsees, he connects the text to the identity of alcoholic. If the newcomer can relate to this section of the book, they can begin to enact the identity of alcoholic. By doing this, Fred also positions his own identity as a sponsor.

Another part of the identity that Fred performed as a sponsor involved teaching his sponsees how to become sponsors. He told his sponsees that they were ready to sponsor once they had completed The Twelve Steps just as he had been told when he was at the same place in his recovery. He taught them that they should "take someone through the steps and do it like we did," and to read each step and then discuss it. Again, the foundations of developing identities within sponsorship were built on reading.

Being a Big Book Thumper. A Big Book Thumper is a term used in A.A. for someone who has such a sound understanding for *The Big* Book that he or she can quote it verbatim at length, often citing specific page numbers and passages without even

cracking the book's spine. Throughout my interviews with Fred, he did not once have to open his *Big Book* to check a reference or locate something he wanted to cite in our discussions. In seventeen years of sobriety, he has memorized large portions of the book, especially the parts most important to him based on what he has learned over those years. He always knew the precise phrase he was looking for by memory, and oftentimes he even cited exact page numbers and word-for-word phrases from the book. While he does not have the entire book memorized, especially after the first 103 pages, he does know enough to be considered by some to be a Big Book Thumper. This identity, in the daily meeting Fred attends, is one of admiration and respect. A Big Book Thumper is someone who knows *The Big Book* very well and who has made reading, memorizing and citing the text a central part of their recovery. This is the identity that Fred enacts as a Big Book Thumper. This identity for Fred includes him knowing certain things about *The Big Book* from memory. He knew exactly how many times the term "phenomenon of craving" was cited in *The Doctor's Opinion*. He also knew that there are forty-three pages dedicated to the first step of A.A. and that the first 103 pages are considered the instruction manual.

In his interviews, Fred claimed that he was not a Big Book Thumper, not because he didn't want to be one, but because he didn't feel like he had earned it. Despite the fact that he could meticulously recall the pages and phrases he wanted to reference from memory, he didn't think he was good enough at it to warrant the honor of being termed a Big Book Thumper.

This identity does not necessarily position Fred as a newcomer or an oldtimer. He falls in some middle ground where he is still thirsting for knowledge and learning, but

does not quite qualify in terms of years of sobriety for the label oldtimer, mostly because there are people in his particular daily meeting with many more years of sobriety.

Discourse. Sponsorship and *The Big Book* carry much of the weight of Discourse in A.A. Fred discussed each of these topics extensively in his interviews, placing weight on both the role that sponsorship had held in his recovery and on how crucial he feels the book is to his sobriety. He believes the book is "a powerful thing" and he was taught this through the interaction of sponsorship. Both the book and sponsorship play into the way Fred is a member of the Discourse community of A.A.

The Discourse of Sponsorship. There is Discourse in A.A, related to using the *Big Book* in the sponsor/sponsee relationship. He discusses how important it is to allow a newcomer to draw his or her own conclusions and interpretations from the text. He then goes on to explain how he works with a newcomer by reading the book with them, and then discussing it together. He even indicates that this should be the process they go through when they work the steps together. "Step one, you read it then you discuss it. Step two, you read it then you discuss it," he says (line 38). As stated before, he also lists the specific pages that are the most important to the newcomer: the first 103 pages and all 43 pages that make up step one. Without the *Big Book* Fred would not be able to sponsor his sponsees the way he does. This text, and the way it is used in the exchange of information between two people, is crucial to the Discourse of sponsorship in A.A.

Fred had certain beliefs about how sponsor/sponsee relationships should work in A.A. He valued a sponsorship in which the book was central to teaching the program and completing the steps. He also discussed what he thought made a good sponsor. He

mentioned that a sponsor should never tell a sponsee what reading *The Big Book* means, saying, "Don't have your sponsor read your book for you…because everybody is going to get something different out of every passage in the book." A good sponsor, to Fred, should ask the sponsee to interpret it. Because this belief is not shared by all the members of A.A., it may not seem like it is connected to the Discourse. However, varying beliefs among members *is* actually a prominent part of the Discourse because it is set in the understanding that sponsor/sponsee relationships vary depending on lineage, as explained below.

The concept that anyone who has completed the steps can be a sponsor makes sponsorship in A.A. a generational process which is part of the Discourse in A.A. A sponsee may not only have a sponsor, but a grand-sponsor (who is their sponsor's sponsor), a great-grand-sponsor (who is their sponsor's sponsor's sponsor) and so on. This evidence of lineage in sponsorship shows how the program is carried down from one generation to the next. Passing the program on in this way is ultimately fulfillment of the 12^{th} step in which the A.A. member carries the message of A.A. to another alcoholic. What makes this a part of Discourse is the understanding that lineage is based on the beliefs of the eldest sponsor. Just as a person might practice a certain religion because of their family's beliefs, so, too, might a sponsee learn the program of A.A. based on the beliefs of the eldest (not by age, but by sobriety) sponsor in their lineage. Fred's sponsees are exposed to the importance of *The Big* Book because it was what Fred's sponsor taught him when he was a newcomer. In Fred's lineage, this literacy practice is passed down from one generation to another as what is deemed valuable and important to

recovery within the program. Someone else might have place more emphasis on their relationship to their higher power based on their sponsorship lineage. There is no one right way of carrying the message to one alcoholic or another, and this is why newcomers are encouraged to ask someone they relate to to be their sponsor. Sponsorship is not necessarily based on length of sobriety, but on the quality of one practicing the principles of A.A. (See Figure 3 for a list of the principles). These principles come as a result of completing the steps, regardless of how these practices manifest between members. This practice, though varied from member to member, is a part of the Discourse of sponsorship in A.A.

The importance of the book. Fred indicates that *The Big Book* is "the most important." He then goes on to say 'it' says 'it' is "the basic text" and "the instruction manual." What Fred is trying to say is that the book, which defines itself as the basic text of A.A., is the guide for doing the steps or the program. The first definition is correct, and the book actually states this on two separate occasions (A.A., 2001, xi, xxiii). However, nowhere in *The Big Book* does it ever say that this text is an instruction manual. Oddly enough, Fred again made this statement multiple times throughout his interviews.

Fred also mentions how he reads the book "as the author wrote it." What Fred means by this is not exactly clear. He could be saying he reads into the literary elements like commas, italics, periods, etc. to try and understand how the author intended a text to be read. It could also mean he tries to understand the perspective of the author when he reads. Either way, what is important about this statement is that Fred interacts with the text in a way that goes beyond just his own comprehension of the words on the page. This

perspective on reading as the author intended leads to another piece about how he reads the text when he says he was told *The Big Book* "is not a novel." This is interesting because Fred continued in this interview to say that a novel is a book that is read only once and then put away on a shelf. Instead, he believes *The Big Book* should be read over and over as indicated by his fervent references to getting something different from the book every time he reads it. Therefore, in Fred's mind, *The Big Book* is not a novel; it is a guide and an instruction manual.

Fred participates in the Discourse of A.A. through the way he uses *The Big Book* to learn, maintain and help others in sobriety. The book is impactful through members' use of reading and sharing the text. Fred speaks in this passage about the importance of each member reading his or her own book. By this he means it is important for those in A.A. to gather and interpret information from the book based on what they comprehend while reading. According to Fred, no member should tell another member what the book says. This Discourse has allowed Fred to interpret and find meaning in the text in a way that is the most valuable to him. This is the most significant part of *The Big Book* for Fred. He believes the book is relatable to every alcoholic, and that the answers to any problem lie within as long as the alcoholic is willing to look for them.

The relateability of this text and the way Fred speaks about it craft two major components of Discourse in A.A. First, Fred believes, as do most members of A.A. that when an alcoholic reads *The Big Book,* they will be able to find something in the book they can relate to. For some, this comes in the first 103 pages or in *The Doctor's Opinion* as is Fred's belief. For others, this does not occur until they read the personal stories of

other alcoholics located in the back of the book and find someone who has a story similar to theirs. Either way, the part of the Discourse of A.A. is that *The Big Book* was written with the intention of relating to all alcoholics. Evidence of this can be seen by the fact that the text uses the word 'you' to speak directly to the alcoholics in need of recovery who might be reading the book. Fred also supports how relatable this text is when he discusses being able to pick up the book and lets it fall to any page when he is under duress. Wherever the book falls open, he is able to relate to what he reads. He learned this by observing a statesman, and it is a practice he still maintains today as what he claims to be a solution to any problem he has ever had. The Discourse of *The Big Book* in A.A. is that the book holds the answer to any life problem a person might have. Fred spoke very intimately about The Big Book in his interviews. He said, "Every time I read that book, it looks like they put something new in there. It's like I'm reading it for the first time. I always find the answers. When I start reading the book, I get that sense of calm. When I read the book, and I find that there is a solution and all I have to keep doing is reading, then I'll be okay. I read the big book of Alcoholics Anonymous and they wrote about me." This passage shows how passionate Fred is about The Big Book, how he feels like it was written about him, how he believed that the book has the answer to any problem he has as long as he takes the time to find it. For Fred, and most alcoholics, it was as if he was reading his own autobiography when he read *The Big Book.* He finally felt for the first time like he wasn't the only one who was suffering the way he had been as an alcoholic, and every time he has read the book in the last seventeen years, he has still been able to find some way to relate to the text. These values are a part of the Discourse

of A.A. It is a way of saying to the alcoholic that they are not alone. “It’s one of those things, to see yourself written by someone else, your uniqueness is gone.”

Part IV: Conclusion

The literacy practice of reading revealed a dynamic perspective about how Fred used language, identity and Discourse in A.A. *The Big Book* was clearly a crucial tool for his life in recovery. He used the book to solve any problem in his life by just flipping to a page and reading until he felt better. He believed that every single time he read the book, he got something out of it.

He used reading to become familiar with the book. The result of this was that he learned the specialist language of A.A.—so much so that he acquired the identity of Big Book Thumper. By learning the language of A.A. so efficiently, he became able to cite entire passages from the book verbatim without ever having to open the text to check his references. This language use led Fred to identity acquisition which in turn situated him as a member of the Discourse community in A.A. In a way, these three things scaffold on top of one another, each impacting the other.

In this process, Fred interacted with his sponsor and other members of A.A. as he used reading the big book to become a sponsee and sponsor in the program. In these interactions, he was able to use the book to interpret what the program of A.A. was intended to do and how it was supposed to work in his life. When Fred discussed sponsorship, he talked about how reading was an important part of the process. This provided evidence that sponsorship can impact the way a person uses literacy in A.A. Fred listened to his sponsor and followed the directions he gave because he believed in

the process of sponsorship and how it could help him in sobriety. By doing this, Fred took his literacy practice and constructed it around what was socioculturally appropriate for him at the time. If his sponsor said read, he read. If his sponsor said to share this process with your sponsee, he did. Within each different identity, whether a sponsor or sponsee, Fred used his *The Big Book* and reading to create and maintain his relationships within A.A, which in turn strengthened and fortified his own sobriety. This has lead Fred to believe that the answer to any life problem he has, not just one dealing with drinking, can be found in *The Big Book*. The book is a crucial part of his sobriety, and thus reading is a crucial literacy practice to maintaining his recovery. Because of his heavy reliance on *The Big Book* and the way he spoke about it, it is evident that Fred has stayed sober for as long as he has because of his reliance on this text. The book, to him, was the solution to alcoholism, and it played an important part in his identity in A.A.

THE TWELVE PROMISES OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness.
2. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it.
3. We will comprehend the word serenity.
4. We will know peace.
5. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others.
6. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear.
7. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows.
8. Self-seeking will slip away.
9. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change.
10. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us.
11. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us.
12. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Figure 3: The Twelve Promises of Alcoholics Anonymous (Alcoholics Anonymous, 2001, p. 83-84).

Chapter 4

WRITE DOWN THE FEELINGS

Part I: Introduction

Janis and I are what people in A.A. call "litter-mates." We came into the program within months of one another and essentially began our sobriety together. I can't begin to explain why, but for some reason the whole thing just didn't stick with Janis that first time. She relapsed time and time again in those first few years, and I'll admit that, at times, it was difficult for me to watch. What were we doing differently? Why did A.A. work for me from day one but not for her? In the end, Janis claims it was because she didn't start out getting sober for herself. It wasn't until she finally surrendered to her own need for sobriety that things really began to fall into place. After three years in and out A.A., she finally put together one consecutive year of sobriety in October of 2012. The curious thing about watching Janis go through all this was that she never stopped writing. In the beginning, it seemed as if she was writing down every single thing that was said in the meetings. She had notebook after notebook full of prayers, reminders, anecdotes and sayings which she used to help her remember things in A.A. I was fascinated by this use of literacy, and on more than one occasion I wondered if maybe I should be doing the same thing. She wrote so much that she made me question how I was working my own program. And that is why it was so fascinating when she volunteered for this study. Her use of many different literacies, including writing as a tool for recovery, reveals the commitment she made to live a new life in sobriety.

Part II: Janis' Life-History

Janis was born in Ogden, UT, in 1955. Her father played basketball in the United States Air Force, and in the year leading up to her first birthday, her family moved around a lot, finally landing in Arizona where her parents had grown up. Her parents both took jobs as teachers, her father as a coach at the local high school and her mother at an elementary school. Janis grew up in what she calls a good neighborhood with a lot of children the same age as her. One of her earliest memories as a child involves being run over by a boy on a bicycle, an incident she remembers mostly because of the way her parent's reacted. "They were just loving and took me in and rinsed my mouth out in the sink. Maybe I discovered how much I liked the attention at that young, you know, of the warmth of that."

Janis came from a big family, ultimately living in close proximity to both sets of grandparents and having two younger sisters. Despite this closeness, the family was also very different. Her father's side of the family was made up of local farmers and laborers. His upbringing even included riding a horse to high school. Her mother's side was the opposite. The family was wealthy and proper, and every Sunday they hosted a formal afternoon supper after church. Janis recalls learning a lot from her maternal grandmother who taught her about etiquette and entertaining.

When Janis was six, her family moved to the next town over. Her father transferred to the high school there taking the athletic director and baseball coaching positions. Her mother, however, continued working at the elementary school, which Janis

recalls became very tough, often involving her mom in gang-related situations with students. She continued to work there until her retirement many years later. Janis doesn't recall this move affecting her negatively at all. "I don't feel weird being moved in the middle of my first grade," she said. She spoke of having a lot of friends throughout grade school and middle school and always being surrounded by kids her age. It was during this time in her life that Janis first remembers being attracted to boys. Several years later in fourth grade she got caught playing spin-the-bottle with three boys. This was the only time in her life that her father spanked her. Other than that incident, her mother was mostly responsible for the discipline in the family.

At about the same time as she was moving from one town to the other, Janis' parent bought some land in Eastern Arizona and built a summer cabin there. From that point on, Janis and her sisters spent every summer there while her father went to work for the forest service. Janis recalls there being a lot of kids there her age as well, and she reflected on the activities they had to partake in because they didn't have access to phones or television. "We would build forts and play games, and we had to use our imagination. We did a lot of running through the woods and walking into town. That was really kind of a neat thing to grow up that way." By the time she was in 8th grade, though, Janis began to dread going away for the summer, especially because she had to leave her friends behind and miss all the good music that came out over the summer. There was only one radio station where her cabin located, and it only played classical music and

oldies. After her freshman year in high school, Janis was allowed to stay home for the summer while her parents and sisters went to the cabin.

High school for Janis was latent with participation in clubs and activities. In addition to being an elected member of student council for three years, she was also the president of a women's social club and a pom-pom girl on the school spirit team. She did most of this to please her parents. "I started taking some drama classes and theater arts and I loved that so much, but my parents kind of said, you should get involved in student council, so I ran for sophomore secretary and won," she recalled. Along the way, she got involved with several boys, and especially remembered one boy named Jeremy whom she met in California on a church retreat. She and her best friend Katy met a couple boys there, and the next thing she knew they were drinking Spinata wine with their new-found friends. This was the first time Janis ever tasted alcohol, and the first time she got drunk. "And that was the first time," she said, "And all we kept saying all night is I want some more. I was even wanting some more way back then." Alcohol began to play a bigger role in Janis' life as high school continued. As the coach's daughter, she began to use alcohol to feel accepted. The boys at the parties she attended in high school would try to hide their booze and cigarettes from her for fear she would tell her father, so she remedied this by guzzling a bottle of wine in front of them. One night at the drive-in, she played the role of entertainer and mixed root beer and rum for her friends. That night, she drank so much she was sick for hours, and she swears she never drank like that again. In the summers while her parents and sisters were away at the cabin, she hosted parties at

her house. She remembers being a caretaker at these events. “I wouldn’t let them drive home if they were drinking,” she said. Throughout these experiences, Janis remembers really wishing she had had a boyfriend. “I just missed the closeness of having a special relationship and so I was always searching for that. I threw myself into having more than one relationship because I didn’t want to be alone.” She recalls being “heart-broken” when she wasn’t asked to homecoming her senior year. Later, this desire for a serious relationship would play a major role in Janis’ life.

In I973, Janis graduated from high school and enrolled at the local university. Her parents encouraged her to become a teacher despite the fact that her interest was in interior design; she even pledged a sorority at her mother’s request. Within two years, her sorority sisters were accusing her of sleeping around and giving them a bad name. Janis was unhappy in school, unhappy in her sorority and felt like she was wasting her parents’ money. She dropped out of college and moved in with a friend and her friend’s little boy. She got a job working for a family friend’s interior design company cleaning and answering the phones.

In 1976, Janis met a boy named Jimmy at a friend’s wedding. He was there with his friends Matt and Drew, and by the end of the night Janis and her friend Katy from high school were back at the boys’ apartment with a case of beer. After that night, Janis and Jimmy began to date, and soon after, she moved into a house with all three boys. She didn’t tell her parents initially, but after getting sick and missing a few days at work, the interior design company called her parents who tracked Janis down. “[My dad] knocked

on the door and he wanted to know everything that was going on and he went into one of the bedrooms and started crying," she said, "I broke my dad's heart." Soon after, Janis got pregnant and she and Jimmy moved into their own apartment together. Her mother encouraged her to get an abortion, but Janis and Jimmy got married instead. In 1977, their son, Ryan, was born, and Janis recalls him being the greatest joy of her life. After that, her parents learned to accept her lifestyle choices.

Janis continued to work in interior design and Jimmy began working for an insurance company. She started attending classes at a local community college to get her degree in interior design and developed some close friendships there. One night after class, Janis and a group of friends went to see a local band perform close to the college. "Well there he was," she said, "Danny. He was the bass player of the band. And there went my heart." Janis was recently married with a newborn son and she was overtaken by her feelings for Danny. The two began to see each other, causally at first, until it developed into a full-blown affair. It wasn't long until her husband found out and the two split up. Her parents suggested she stay in the cabin during the summer in an attempt to keep her away from Danny. However, that summer, Danny *and* Janis moved into the cabin.

During that summer, Janis experimented with drugs for the first time. She smoked pot multiple times per day and also tried mushrooms for the first time. "This whole summer, I smoked a shitload of pot," she said, "I mean it was our prior-to activity." Through this, she continued to drink heavily, despite getting a job at a local restaurant. At

the end of the summer, Jimmy learned of the drugs and of Danny being with Janis at the cabin, and filed for divorce and full custody of Ryan. Janis paid her divorce lawyer with a case of Bacardi Rum, and left her baby behind to follow Danny to Hollywood with his band. The couple stayed there for only six months before moving back to Arizona. While Janis had been successful in a temp job, Danny's band did not do well and both missed home.

Janis moved into a house with three girls and got a job for a local restaurant called the Messy Guitar. This job took Janis into a whole new era of drugs and alcohol. Cocaine came into play, and almost everyone she worked with was using drugs. "[One guy] would say, 'you need to go clean the slicer,' which meant there was a line on the slicer for me while we were working." Janis was in her mid-twenties by this time and her ex-husband Jimmy decided to take job in San Francisco. She put a fight to keep her son Ryan in Arizona and she soon had her son living with her full-time. Danny popped in an out of her life for years, and she recalls knowing that anytime he came around she would be going home with him. A few years later, Danny was killed after he drove off of a cliff. Janis still doesn't know if it was intentional or not. "I was actually able to move on," she said, "Finally."

By the end of the 1980s, Janis was still working at the Messy Guitar but had moved in with a friend she knew from her family's cabin named Hailey. Hailey helped Janis take care of Ryan at night while she went to work. Then she got fired from the Guitar and worked at several different bars to make ends meet. In 1990, Matt, Danny's

old friend and Janis' former roommate, came into one of the bars and asked Janis to his company's Christmas party. She was surprised to see him, but agreed to go. Within a month the two moved in together, and within a year they were married. "We decided we liked each other enough [that] we should get married," she said, "but there was never that kind of deep love for one another."

After this marriage Janis' drinking became rampant. Her mother mentioned that she was worried about how much both she and Matt drank, but Janis ignored her warning. The couple started having happy-hour together every day. They purchased a mini-van together based on the fact that his beer can *and* her wine tumbler would both fit in the cup holder. Janis took a job at Marty's Bar, where she worked for ten years, and began drinking every day at work. When she opened the bar, she would drink. When there was a shift change, she would drink. When she was stocking the bar, she would drink. She was highly functioning in this behavior for years. During this time, Matt's son, Mike, came to live with the couple and Ryan graduated from high school. Mike, who was a troubled youth, suffered from several behavior disorders and had violent tendencies. . In 1997, this came to a pinnacle for Janis when Mike pushed her during an altercation, resulting in her falling to the kitchen floor and slamming her head on the ground. A week later, Janis fell into a coma and had to have brain surgery. After that, Mike moved back in with his mother, but this traumatic experience left Janis without much memory of the next couple years of her life.

In 1999, Janis got a job at Oxnard Tavern where she bartended Monday through Friday during the day. Her behavior of daily drinking continued, and she also began drinking gallons of wine at home as well. She began to increase the amount she was drinking every day and she started to get sick. Her stomach became distended and Matt finally decided she needed to go to the hospital. She suffered from liver enlargement and watched the nurses drain a half-gallon of thick brown fluid from her stomach. The doctor said, "If you drink, you're going to die," but Janis just thought he was a mean doctor. She stayed sober for six months, but started drinking again soon after she returned to work. She recalls that this was the first time she had to hide her drinking. Everyone in her family, including her husband, knew she was not allowed to drink, so she would hide the alcohol in water bottles or sneak a drink when no one was looking. In 2007, she was fired from her job at Oxnard, and bounced from job to job rarely staying for more than a few weeks because it interfered with her drinking. Finally, she remained unemployed and drank all day at home. She used the money she got from her parents at Christmas and on her birthday to pay for her alcohol.

On her 53rd birthday, Janis took a trip with her childhood friend, Katy, and her younger sister, Sarah, to San Diego. During the trip, Janis was so intoxicated she passed out in the shower, hit her head on the faucet and went into seizures. She had to fly back to Arizona, and when she arrived home, she was met by her entire family, Ryan, her step-children and her friends. They were there to stage an intervention.

Janis checked in to a local rehab facility, but recalls only doing so to please her family and friends. While she was there, she was roommates with a heroin addict, which made Janis believe she didn't really have a problem. "I'm not fucked up, this girl's fucked up!" she remembers thinking. She did everything she was supposed to do in rehab because she knew it was what would get her out. When she was released she started going to A.A. meetings with her friend Hailey who already had a year of sobriety. Over the next three years, Janis relapsed too many times for her to count. She would put together six months of sobriety here, three weeks there, four days here, but she always went back out drinking. She checked into rehab two more times, once just to detox and once for a thirty-day inpatient program. She continued to go to A.A. meetings throughout this period, got a sponsor and remembers that she was always honest in the meetings and stood up to say she had less than thirty days of sobriety. The last time Janis detoxed, she did so by herself in her home. Her alcohol withdrawals were so intense during this final detox that she realized she had to get sober for good. "All of a sudden I finally came to the full realization," she thought, "I can't ever be this sick again." It was October of 2011, and the next day Janis returned to her normal A.A. group to begin her first real stint of long-term sobriety.

Part III: Writing to Remember in Sobriety

I was coming to meetings and I was really starting to listen. I had heard all these things before, but I didn't really listen and let it come in. If I need to remember something, if I write it down I can, even if I don't go back and look at it. It's kinda locked

into my brain. When people would say something that stood out or I related to, I would write it down. I just know that helps me remember stuff. I think writing things helps you remind yourself about, you know, good days, bad days, feeling emotions. Anytime I write anything down I have a better connection to it. It helps me to remember it like when I was trying to memorize the 3rd step prayer because that's a prayer I say every morning. I had to write it down a couple times to help me remember it. I've always been a writer-downer to remind me of things and to help me memorize something. I've always kinda tried to be a journaler. I would say the journaling your inner most thoughts, that comes from the experience of what you read and what happens in here. Because every time I open my book I see that I'm accountable for a commitment I made to living this new life. I journaled out of a lot of wanting to feel better about myself. I did a lot of things to take the first step, to admit my unmanageability. I mean I did a lot of different writings 'cause you know there can be a lot of stuff to write. And I think every time I did write down things that I took responsibility for, I didn't wanna admit that I was so full of shame. I was just writing down little statements or little experiences as I went, as I listened in the meetings. I would write what people talked about cause I used to journal during the meetings. I would write down phrases. I would write down the feelings. I would write down the Principles or I would write down the Traditions. The promises are on page 83 and 84. It helps me to just write it down because it puts my thoughts into a kind of order. I wish I could write it a little more cooler so I could share with somebody that way. If I think it's important I have shared with Hailey. She also does a lot of journaling, and she

shared a lot of her writing with me. I'm going to make more time to start journaling again, because I think right now is an important time. It's a whole different realm from where I was when I first started journaling in the program. I think I would write down ideas of what I could say to somebody; to a sponsee. I know I want to get back to writing. I could sit and write and that would be really good for me and also give me some ideas on how I could spread the message and help somebody 'cause you really get that. That's something that really comes, that they say and say again throughout the program. About how important it is to share the message and help somebody through the hard time of making your mind up to surrender. I think there are answers in the book but the only way to know that they are the answers is if someone told you that they worked for them.

Analysis

Language. The most prominent way that Janis used specialist language in the program was through writing. Although her writing was completed as solely individual practice, it was the social and cultural conventions of A.A. that gave her something to write about. Janis used her writing to learn what was socially appropriate in A.A., even taking the time to write down certain prayers as a means to help her memorize them. Her writing was the way she internalized the language of A.A., making it something she could reflect on. She used writing to decipher what the most important topics to her own sobriety were, thus giving value to the importance of her learning the language so that she could become an authentic member of the group.

Writing to complete the steps. When Janis spoke about journaling in A.A. she mentioned three of the twelve steps. She specifically spoke about how these three steps manifested in her writing, thus giving her a grasp on what was both socially and culturally appropriate for each.

For the 1st step, Janis said, "I did a lot of things to take the first step, to admit my unmanageability. I mean I did a lot of different writings 'cause you know there can be a lot of stuff to write." When she cites the term "unmanageability" Janis is specifically referencing the language of the 1st step in A.A. which states, "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol and that our lives had become unmanageable" (A.A., 2001, p. 59). Writing out her 1st step gave Janis a grasp on what this term meant within A.A. The general expectation for the 1st step is for the alcoholic to admit the specific ways in which their alcohol use has made life difficult to live. Janis believed she had a lot of "stuff to write" for this step, indicating that she understood the specialist language of the 1st step, especially the specific parameter that this unmanageability had to relate to alcohol use. She indicates how, by writing this step down, she was able to take responsibility for her actions despite feeling so shameful over the way alcohol had ruled her life. Through her writing, she came to terms with the fact that her life had, in fact, become unmanageable, which allowed her to admit her powerlessness.

Writing was also a tool that helped Janis memorize the 3rd step prayer. The 3rd step prayer is specialist language in A.A. for a short prayer that many alcoholics say as a way of starting their day, including Janis, who has memorized it because it is a prayer she

says every day. If someone in A.A. says they began their day with the 3rd step prayer, other members would know this person is communicating that they began their day by surrendering themselves to the will of their higher power. The verbiage of this prayer is as follows:

> "God, I offer myself to Thee- To build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always!" (A.A., 2001, p. 63).

What is important about this in Janis' case is that she used writing to relate to this prayer. She says, "Anytime I write anything down, I have a better connection to it." Knowing this, Janis used writing to help her memorize the entire prayer. She admits to having to write it down multiple times, but it was this action that allowed her to connect to the prayer, and thus become familiar with what it meant within the context of A.A. By memorizing the 3rd step prayer, she became familiar enough with it to have sufficiently acquired the term as specialist language.

The 12th Step states, "having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs" (A.A, 2001, p. 60). While Janis never actually uses the words "12th Step," she does mention on several occasions how writing would allow her to carry the message to other alcoholics. This is the primary purpose of the 12th step. By using writing to develop

the ways she plans to carry the message in the future, Janis makes it clear that she has a good understanding of the language of the 12th step. She doesn't have to mention it directly, because the specialist language she uses when she says "spread the message" and "share the message" are indicators within the program of 12th step work. However, rather than working this step through the process of storytelling like most alcoholics, Janis uses writing to develop her message. This will become more relevant in the next section about identity and how developing this message through writing prepared Janis for sponsorship.

Writing to learn the program. Janis also spoke about writing as a way for her to learn the parts of the program that were not related to the steps. She mentions writing down specific things people talked about as a way of relating to what was being said. She used writing in this way to learn other components of specialist language in A.A. like The Twelve Traditions, The Twelve, Promises and The Twelve Principles (See Figures 2, 3 and 4, respectively). Outside of The Twelve Steps, these three pieces of literature are the next most notable in A.A. They outline the ways in which the program works (the traditions), but also what is promised will come true if a person works the program completely (the promises). The traditions and the promises are both mentioned in *The Big Book* and certainly make up a portion of the specialist language in A.A. Interestingly though, the principles are a more recent development within the program. The word principles is used more than thirty times in *The Big Book* yet no mention is ever made of a list of twelve of them. This is because the list of the principles came out of the 12th step

which ends by stating that alcoholics will, “practice these principles in all our affairs” (A.A., 2001, p. 59). As a result of this, a list of moral principles was created to correspond with each of The Twelve Steps. The fact that Janis makes mention of the principles gives her a unique familiarity with the program. While everyone who is familiar with the steps knows they are to practice the principles in all their affairs, the actual list of principles is something that is generally overlooked. Janis, however, has used writing to connect to these principles, writing them down so that she could put her thoughts in order and help her connect to them. This is one of the ways she used writing to learn the program of A.A., and it was effective enough to give her insight into a part of the program that many members do not often consider.

Identity. Janis talked about her literacy practice as a process, one that she performed as a newcomer and that she hoped to perform as a sponsor. She went from writing what she deemed meaningful in the meetings and out of *The Big Book* in the beginning to wanting to write what she could potentially share with a sponsee someday. Her writing transitioned from being about what was important to her a newcomer to what would be important to her sponsees if she should become a sponsor. This is how Janis enacted identity in A.A. through the literacy practice of writing

Being a retread and a newcomer. It was hard to say when exactly the beginning of Janis’ sobriety was. Because she relapsed multiple times over the first three years of her participation in A.A., the beginning of her sobriety happened more than one time. This identity was what some in A.A. called a ‘retread’. A retread is someone who had

relapsed, or had begun using alcohol again, and was returning to A.A. in order to get sober. This did *not* include people who tried to get sober on their own and relapsed outside of A.A. For example, a lot of people try to stop drinking on their own before going to A.A. for the first time. If they decide to use alcohol again, it is not necessarily considered a relapse by A.A. terms because they were never members of the program in the first place. In order for a person to be considered a retread, they must have been in A.A., relapsed, and be returning to A.A. in hopes of maintain their sobriety. When Janis discussed how she had heard things in A.A. before, but that she hadn't really listened, she shows how she had been in and out of A.A.

Once someone is a retread, or has had a relapse in A.A., they return to the identity of a newcomer, regardless of how much time they had before they went back out. This was how Janis enacted the identity of newcomer. For Janis, because she had relapsed multiple times within her first three years, she never really retained any identity aside from one of a person new to the program despite being present in meetings for more than three years.

Janis placed herself within the typical identity of being a newcomer when she talked about working the steps for the first time. Unlike the other two participants of this study, she didn't have enough time in sobriety to really position herself as anything else besides a newcomer or a retread. She stood up so many times to accept a newcomer chip that it was difficult to view her identity as a newcomer without also thinking of her as a retread. In this identity crisis, she used writing to try and make sense of the program. The topics she discussed writing about are topics that would be most prevalent to a newcomer in

A.A. She was trying to learn how to be a non-drinking alcoholic in A.A. through writing down important things from the book and notable phrases she heard in meetings. She took time to write down her first step, suppressing the feelings of shame that she felt over her behavior as a drinking alcoholic. She did this for years, even though it didn't result in long-term sobriety (with long-term meaning at least one year), but she did credit this practice with teaching her about A.A. When she was finally ready to stay sober, this practice had taught her the program well enough to do so.

Becoming a sponsor. Janis journaled a lot in the beginning of her sobriety, or in the first few years while she popped in and out of A.A. At the time of our interviews, however, she had not written anything in months. She did, however, express a desire to begin writing again. She says, "I know I want to get back to writing," and "I'm going to make more time to start journaling again." It is evident when she uses language such as "when I first started journaling" and this important time being "a whole different realm" that she views her identity differently today than she did when she initially entered the program Once she acquired her first one-year chip, she began to view herself differently within the program. She was no longer trying to learn the program through her writing. Instead, she had a desire to begin journaling again so that she could carry the message to other alcoholics. As is protocol for the program, because she has completed The Twelve Steps, she now qualifies to take on the identity of sponsor. While she had yet to actually become a sponsor at the time of our interviews, her writing in A.A. has begun to prepare her for that identity. For Janis, writing was a way for her to document the ideas she had

for a future sponsee. Through journaling, she was able to create a bank of knowledge that she will be able to turn to when it finally becomes her turn to carry the message through sponsorship. This is important to Janis because she has been taught "about how important it is to share the message and help somebody through the hard time of making your mind up to surrender." In this statement, Janis exposes how sharing the message can guide someone to surrendering, which is understood in A.A. as completing the 1st step. She did this through the literacy practice of writing.

Discourse

When Janis spoke about using writing to help her remember things in A.A., she made certain aspects of the program more or less valuable. She talked about the 3rd step prayer as something she wanted to memorize because she says it every single day. The fact that she recited something every day made what she was reciting more important, but the detail that she used writing to help her do this was also crucial to the significance of her literacy practice in A.A. She also discussed that, through journaling, she could describe "feeling emotions" stating forthrightly that writing had an impact on her emotional and mental state as a member of A.A. This also made writing a significant tool for recovery for Janis. She talked about her desire to want to start journaling again because "right now is an important time." At the time of this interview, Janis was within one week of receiving her first one-year chip. After three years in and out of the program, this was indeed an important time for her. The fact that receiving her one-year chip was so meaningful for her also indicated that her writing might be different during this time

than it was when she first came into the program, also showing how significant this literacy practice is for her in A.A.

The Discourse of the individual journey. The Discourse that Janis practices most in this data is how she internalizes the information in A.A. in her own way. There are no rules or guidelines in A.A. for the way a person must do the steps of the way he or she must participate in meetings. By using writing as a tool for both of these practices, Janis shows that she values the message of A.A. and the suggestions that she is supposed to follow, yet she practices this in her own way by journaling, taking notes, writing down phrases to remember and using writing to work the steps. Though this might seem vague, it aligns directly with the appropriate Discourse in A.A. for each member to do whatever it takes to stay sober. Often newcomers are told they must be "willing to go to any length" to stay sober, and for Janis, this includes the literacy practice of writing every day. In some ways, there was even a sense of guilt felt by Janis as she discussed needing to get back into journaling now that she has a year of sobriety. There seemed to be some level of discomfort for her when she considered that the frequency of her writing seemed to decrease the longer she was sober. This discomfort was likely drawn from the fact that she knew it went against what she valued as normal practice in A.A. and thus went against what she believed was the appropriate Discourse. Her remedy to this discomfort was to get back into writing, which would allow her to continue her sobriety in a way similar to how she had begun it.

The Discourse of the program. The Discourse that Janis exhibited reached to the very fundamental structure of A.A. She diligently worked the steps, doing so through writing. She valued what she read in *The Big Book* to the point of journaling about it to help her memorize it. She was familiar with the traditions, the promises and the principles. She planned to become a sponsor soon, and was preparing herself for this role. What she was describing in the relationship between herself and a future sponsee was a typical sponsor-sponsee relationship. Janis was planning to help a sponsee to better understand the program through the use of what she had written, which was a reflection of what she believed was valuable and important in the program. This Discourse reflected the common practice of the way a person transitions through the program. She had been a newcomer, completed the steps, and now was preparing to become a sponsor. In the long run, this would lead to her becoming an oldtimer and possibly an elder statesman someday. This cycle through A.A. is valued and is believed to be a large part of what keeps A.A. functioning. Newcomers believe they cannot survive without oldtimers and oldtimers believe they cannot survive without the newcomers. This idea was supported by the relationship that Janis had with writing down what she heard from other people in the meetings in addition to what she hoped to one day say to a sponsee. Following what was appropriate in A.A., she learned this Discourse in her own way, through writing.

Part IV: Conclusion

For Janis, writing in A.A. was important because it helped her connect to the program. She exhibited writing as a way of creating a landscape of understanding for her and she did so with a sociocultural motivation present.

As stated in the introduction chapter to this dissertation, *The Big Book* is an attachment to the culture of A.A. It was created as a way of carrying the message of A.A. to other alcoholics and as way of explaining the way the program works, not just to those who need it, but also to their families and employers. Without A.A., *The Big Book* would not exist and it is therefore a cultural artifact of the program of A.A. When Janis spoke of the book, and writing down portions of it for memorization, she was doing so as a function of her environment. A.A. in itself, is a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon and therefore the relationships that are built and the communication that exists there are a part of what society values as a means for recovery from alcoholism. When Janis decided to get sober, she knew, based on her interactions in society and specifically with her friend Hailey, that A.A. was a valuable place to go to get help. Beginning her sobriety with that frame of mind meant that every interaction she had from there on would have that value as a foundation. She used the tool of writing as a utensil for gaining knowledge about A.A., retaining that knowledge and then making decisions about how to use that knowledge in order to stay sober (i.e., getting a sponsee, carrying the message, completing the steps, etc.) Janis had the skill she needed to know how to write. This skill was instilled in her long before she knew she was an alcoholic. What she

used this skill for in A.A., however, was to become a citizen of the community of the program. She desired the identity of a non-drinking alcoholic, and she thus gained knowledge through writing from within the community in order to comprehend the language and behaviors that were appropriate to the identity she desired to cultivate.

At one point, Janis discussed wanting to get back to journaling because "it's a whole different realm" from the place she was in emotionally and mentally than when she first came in. Janis was really reaching to the core of how literacy can be used in A.A. She recognized that there has been a shift in her identity in A.A. from someone with no knowledge to someone with some knowledge. So often, newcomers are told in a rehab facility that it would be good for them to start journaling. Some of them are even required to do so. This was also the case for Janis. However, now, at a pivotal time in her sobriety when she is finally celebrating one year, she longs for that desire to write not from the perspective a brand new member, but from the perspective of someone who has gained enough knowledge to communicate what she values in A.A. today to someone else.

In her interviews, Janis often used the common A.A. mantra "happy joyous and free" to describe her life today, but reflected on the beginning of her sobriety as being full of shame and guilt. This comparison of emotion between her early sobriety and her present sobriety lent itself to a much different type of literacy use today. Whereas in the beginning she journaled about her problems, her sadness, her guilt for disappointing her family, today she would more likely journal about the message of A.A., how it has led her to this new way of living and how she could pass it on to a sponsee. This was a

sociocultural process in that her writing was intended to better the A.A. community by preparing her to share her knowledge with someone new in hopes that their interaction would, in turn, inspire the newcomer to practice literacy in the same way she has.

THE TWELVE PRINCIPLES OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

1. Honesty
2. Hope
3. Faith
4. Courage
5. Integrity
6. Willingness
7. Humility
8. Brotherly Love
9. Discipline
10. Perseverance
11. Awareness of God
12. Service

Figure 4: The Twelve Principles of Alcoholics Anonymous (variation on display in research context)

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Discovery

For a good portion of this dissertation I constantly fought myself on whether I was writing for the academic or the alcoholic. Knowing that someone in need of recovery might read this one day, I felt I had to limit my academic language in order to appeal to them. On the other hand, knowing that this study was, in fact, a dissertation, I knew I also needed to charm the academics with sound research and good data analysis. This paradox led to a constant negotiation of my own identity as I wrote with both my audiences in mind. Each data chapter was constructed to appeal to both the academic *and* the alcoholic, with certain parts more apt to captivate one or the other. This conclusion also aims to engage both sides. In this chapter, I hope to show not only what I learned, but also how this study proves useful to the recovering alcoholic while remaining relevant to the field of literacy research.

To begin, I believe the most important thing I learned from this study is not *why* A.A. works, but *how*. I wanted so badly to make a connection between literacy practice and *why* A.A. had been so successful for nearly 80 years (as of January 2011, there were over two million reported members of A.A. according to aa.org) as if to solve some great mystery in the program. What I found instead was that literacy practice for the participants of this study was actually *how* A.A. works. I don't mean this to contradict what *The Big Book* says in its chapter titled *How it Works*. Rather, what I mean to say is

that the process each participant used to enact literacy practice in A.A. is what allowed them to work A.A. as the book suggests, or as their sponsor suggests, or as they have seen it worked by others. Their ability to listen, speak, read and write as both independent practices and also as functions of one another is how they have been able to stay sober as it has been suggested by A.A. Even though each participant used literacy in a different way, each use also led to the discovery of what the participants valued and believed as the correct or appropriate way of being a member of Alcoholics Anonymous. Whether they identified as a newcomer, a sponsor, an oldtimer, or a sponsee, the way they used literacy was at the root of each identity.

What This Study Taught Me

From a sociocultural perspective, literacy is about gaining knowledge across a variety of different resources in addition to understanding how to evaluate each resource for one's own needs. Literacy practice, as is exemplified by this study, is a global practice in many different Discourses, used in different way for different purposes as shown by the participants in this study. Robert, Fred and Janis show how they use literacy practice as it is linked to the process of being sober. In some cases, the way they exhibit literacy is guided by their sponsor, an oldtimer, or another member in A.A. This indicates that literacy practice is an inherited behavior from older members of A.A. to new members In the case of this study, *The Big Book* was commonly used by all three of the participants to learn how to be a non-drinking alcoholic in A.A., how to work the steps, and how to behave as a sponsor and sponsee.

What I learned from this was that every person in A.A. uses their literacy practice in A.A. to do and accomplish different things. When Janis spoke of writing things down so that she could someday share them with a sponsee, she was outlining how she intended to perform as a sponsor. When Fred read specific pages from the book because it was what his sponsor said to do, he was trying to learn the program because it was important for him to stay sober. For Robert, who learned how do the twelve steps in a 'ready fashion' from the oldtimers in the program and his book, he listened because he was afraid if he didn't he was going to die. The behaviors described above show exactly how the three participants were able to use the sociocultural perspective of literacy to learn what it meant to be an alcoholic in A.A. and then how to behave and reconstruct the appropriate behaviors in different ways using the literacy practices of writing, reading and listening.

Language

The three participants' stories showed the power of language within the context of AA. The results of this study taught me that language is power in A.A. because it is tied to the social setting of the group (Gee, 2004). It is used in different contexts of the program like *The Big Book*, sponsorship, the steps and storytelling. When a newcomer joins A.A. and decides to get sober, a process of language acquisition commences as they begin to negotiate the appropriate techniques to communicate within the cultural setting of the program. This includes the ways they use language that is special to A.A. so they can appear as an authentic and valuable member of the group. Once they have grasped

this language and are able to use it subconsciously as a regular part of their everyday membership within the group, they have more power in the group than they did as someone who was void of the appropriate specialist language and could not communicate effectively.

Specialist language in A.A. manifests in several different places. First, it is a prolific part of *The Big Book.* Robert claimed that the answer to any problem the alcoholic was ever going to have was in *The Big Book.* By saying this, he exhibited familiarity with the language of the book and how it can be relatable to the alcoholic. Fred had large portions of *The Big Book* memorized, which naturally provided him with a vast understanding of the specialist language in A.A. Janis used the book in her writing to help her memorize the 3rd step prayer so she would be able to recite it every day. She also used it to learn the traditions, even citing what specific page they could be found on.

Second, I discovered in the participants' stories that language acquisition was founded in the relationships they had with their sponsors. Robert was taught what language was appropriate in the program by the oldtimers he spent time with in early sobriety. Fred developed specialist language through sponsorship because he was told specific pages to read out of the *The Big Book* by his sponsor. In this interaction, Fred was pushed towards acquiring the language without realizing it was intentional on the part of his sponsor. Janis used specialist language when she spoke about writing down what she would one day say to a sponsee about how to carry the message of A.A. What I

learned from this was that sponsorship guided each participant's acquisition of specialist language through the different literacy practices they used.

Finally, the participants taught me that using appropriate language in A.A is a primary part of knowing how to complete the steps. When each of them spoke about the steps, they used specialist language in their descriptions of how to complete them. Robert learned this language as he listened to the oldtimers in the program who taught him to complete the steps in a "ready fashion." Fred learned the language of the steps because he was so familiar with the first 103 pages of the book, which he mentioned several times in his interviews. This section is where the steps are written for the first time. For Janis, learning the specialist language of A.A. in order to complete the steps included knowing what to write in order to complete her 1st step. This step had to relate to the unmanageability of her life as a result of alcohol, which was a piece of language inherently special to A.A.

Language is also an important component of storytelling in A.A. because of how structured the format for storytelling is in A.A. The storytelling component relies heavily on the A.A. members' ability to use the appropriate specialist language to communicate the ideas of A.A. at meetings, through sponsorship, and in the completion of the steps. Sharing one's story is a part of membership in A.A. There is a particular way that a person's story must be told in order for it to be deemed appropriate in the program. This is called qualifying, and it encompasses a person telling their story to share what their life was like before they got sober, what happened that led them to sobriety and what their

life is like today. In the very act of being participants of this study, Robert, Fred and Janis all qualified their story to me. They shared their stories exactly as they should in order to qualify as a member of A.A. and this therefore gave their story power within the program because they used language to follow the appropriate Discourse.

The main conclusion about language from this study is how important listening, reading and writing are as modes for acquiring specialist language in A.A. What I learned was that each participant used language differently, showing how individuals craft their own literacy practice in A.A. based on their own needs. Each participant used specialist language as they spoke in their interviews, referencing A.A. specific topics like the traditions, the promises, the steps and the principles. They also used terminology like carrying the message and doing the steps in a ready fashion. What this taught me was that, despite the fact that they used different types of literacy practice, the end result for each of them was acquisition of specialist language in A.A. Between *The Big Book*, sponsorship, completing the steps, and storytelling literacy practices were crucial to the participants in how they negotiated language use to craft their identities within A.A. even though they didn't all practice literacy in the same way.

Identity

This study taught me that identity acquisition in A.A. occurs in members as both individuals and as a group. The participants of this study took on multiple identities like newcomer, sponsor and sponsee, but they also enacted broader identities like storyteller and member in A.A. Part of what I learned here was that this identity acquisition is not as

easy for some as it is for others. For example, Robert and Fred took on the program in one shot and neither of them has ever relapsed. For Janis, though, it took three years to truly acquire the identity of newcomer without also being identified as a retread. No matter how difficult or easy it was for the participants to acquire these identities, the use of listening, reading and writing became a means of learning what it meant to be labeled as different things in A.A. All three participants in this study spoke at some point about being a newcomer in the program. They each went from living a life of chaos filled with car accidents, job loss and family issues, to living a new, sober life in A.A. according to what A.A. deemed appropriate and authentic behaviors. For Robert, it has been more than thirty years since he acquired this identity and for Fred it has been over seventeen years. Janis is just emerging from truly identifying as an alcoholic and has begun to think about becoming a sponsor, a process foreign to a newcomer.

What I learned here was that identity was acquired in a similar way to specialist language. For Robert, Fred and Janis, literacy practice played a large role in how they were able to become different characters within the context of A.A. There was no right or wrong way for the participants to acquire identity. Robert listened intently to the oldtimers who described a new way of life and told him everything he needed to do in order to get what they had. Through this process of listening, he was able to see how destructive his life as a drinker was and begin to value what it meant to be sober. This led to his individual identities of newcomer and sponsee and his group identity of storyteller and A.A. member. Fred began to read *The Big Book* everyday as a result of getting a

sponsor and beginning to work the steps. Through this process, he was able to learn how the identity of a sponsee and a member of A.A. should be constructed based on the stories he read in the book. Janis achieved this same process through writing as she used this literacy practice to become familiar with what she deemed the most important topics in the program. Once each of the participants began to value their new way of life through their literacy practice, they also began to take on the identity of a sober member of A.A. even though they each did this in a different way.

Before this study, I knew that the identity of being an alcoholic would be present in the stories of the participants, but I didn't realize how much I would learn about how their lives leading up to sobriety played a large role in this identity acquisition. In the chronologies that filled the first portion of each data chapter, Robert, Fred and Janis were filled with shame and regret. In some cases, they even feared for their lives, like Robert who didn't think he would live past 50, and Janis who was told she would die if she didn't stop drinking. Robert, Fred and Janis didn't just stop drinking; they changed the way they thought about drinking and what it had done to their lives. Robert, Fred and Janis all spoke of the process of completing The Twelve Steps, a process which solidifies this transformative process through the use of listening, reading and writing. They have not only removed alcohol from their lives, but they are identifying exactly how drinking was related to all of their defects of character. For Janis, this process was very difficult, even in her first step, as she described having to write it several times and feeling shame for her behavior as a drinking alcoholic. Holland et al. state, "she must replace her

previous image of an alcoholic as a drunk or with the AA definition of an ill person, learning to see the identity of an A.A. alcoholic as desirable, and learning to see herself as like or potentially like those who hold this identity" (1998, p. 74). For Robert, he carried his fourth step around with him for months until the oldtimers finally convinced him to throw it away. For Fred, he felt like he had been given a do-over when he was done with his fourth and fifth steps. It was as if enacting this identity as an alcoholic gave him a second chance on life. Literacy practice was performed with the social support of the members of A.A. in order to provide the newcomers a context in which to craft their cultural identity.

Through this study, I also learned how much power storytelling has in the identity acquisition of members of A.A. When the participants talked about carrying the message of A.A. to other alcoholics, they were communicating how they shared their own story as a sober member of A.A. This process of storytelling was the way in which the participants crafted their own identities within A.A. It was their way of deciding what was important or unimportant in the telling of how A.A. has changed their lives. All three participants spoke fondly of carrying the message and doing twelfth step work. Carrying the message in A.A. involved their ability to use listening, reading and writing to reach someone in need of recovery, share their story and thus develop their identities as members of A.A. "In A.A., talk is a central medium of transformation. Whether activity or language is the central issue, the important point concerning learning is one of access to practice as a resource for learning rather than instruction." (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.

85). Listening to the participants of this study talk about their own stories and their storytelling experiences showed me that their literacy practices were at the root of the how they began to craft their stories and their identities from the beginning of their time in the program.

The participants in this study don't explicitly state that they were taught how to carry the message. Rather, when they begin the phase of their recovery where they share at meetings, they do so based on what they have observed and experienced as a newcomer. Their identities as storytellers are crafted based on their ability to listen throughout early sobriety. This aligns well with what Gee (2009) says about exposure leading to secondary discourse acquisition. It seems, at least with these three participants, that exposure also led to identity acquisition.

Discourse

Similarly to language and identity, what I learned about Discourse from this study is that all three of the participants acquired it in different ways using different literacy practices. They learned the practices of the community of AA through experience with the appropriate behaviors, language, relationships and settings. Their behaviors in the context of A.A. were made meaningful because of the Discourse of the program. What I found most meaningful was that each participant communicated the Discourse to others in the same mode by which they acquired it in the first place. When Robert spoke of going out to do twelfth step work and carry the message, he knew from listening to the oldtimers around him do the same thing, and the appropriate ways to behave in this

setting. The mode by which he was able to complete this work was by encouraging a newcomer to listen in turn. Once he was able to do this effectively, he showed how "learning to become a legitimate participant involves learning how to talk (and be silent) in the manner of full participants. In A.A. telling the story of the life of the non-drinking alcoholic is clearly a major vehicle for the display of membership" (Lave & Wenger, 1991 p. 105). Robert's encouragement of others to listen was fashioned by what he acquired as his secondary discourse through practice, making it sociocultural in nature.

When Robert, Fred and Janis spoke of *The Big Book* each of them placed enormous emphasis on its worth in A.A. It has saved their lives, provided them with the answers to every problem they have ever had, and taught them how to do the steps. This taught me how much power my participants placed on the book. It also taught me that there was necessarily power in the ability to use and comprehend it. Thus, the participants read it, shared about it, and wrote about it with the overt expectation that it would help keep them sober. There was an unconscious expectation that becoming familiar with the book would give them literacy through mastery of the Discourse. This belief is valued because it was appropriate to the social context of A.A.

Based on this mastery of appropriate behavior it became evident to me that Discourse among my participants was acquired through social practice, and that it was not an innate or pre-prescribed process in the program. Robert, Fred and Janis did not go into A.A. knowing exactly how to think, act and believe appropriately; nor was it the focus of their attendance. However, through the process of recovery (i.e. getting a

sponsor, doing the steps, etc), they each slowly learned the suitable ways of acting, thinking, speaking and behaving. Exposure was key in acquiring the secondary Discourse of A.A., and for the three participants, being able to use the literacy practices of listening, speaking, reading and writing effectively within the community of A.A. demonstrated their mastery of this secondary Discourse. This reinforced what I already knew about Discourse: it is acquired through the process of doing and seeing, not through the process of traditional teaching and learning. Performing appropriately in A.A. cannot be taught, it must be acquired through exposure and practice.

Closing

Future Research

In many places throughout the world, including some rural areas in the United States, there are no meetings available to people in need of recovery. To remedy this, many online meetings have been established through sites like aateps2recovery.org and aaonline.net. While most online meetings cite the inability of someone to physically attend a meeting as the reason for a digital meeting space, many of these sites also view themselves as offering additional anonymity. Aaonline.net says, "The primary purpose of AAOnline.net is to carry the Alcoholics Anonymous message of recovery to the alcoholic who still suffers. In using this electronic medium, the message of recovery can be brought to those unable to physically attend meetings and shared under the protection of increased anonymity with those who would not otherwise have made contact in any other way" (homepage). Their purpose is also to make available a meeting space for someone who

would not have otherwise gone to a meeting. This does not mean they were bound by geography, but also perhaps by shame, embarrassment or lack of knowledge about A.A. Future research could investigate how online identities are formed in these communities or how literacy practice is enacted in an online capacity. It would also be interesting to investigate how these communities construct their meeting spaces, and how these are similar or different from a face-to-face meeting at an Alano club.

Another area of research that I would like to pursue is how gender issues are communicated through sponsorship. Oftentimes in meetings, I have heard oldtimers chastise the 'lovey-dovey' relationships they see in A.A. today as they reflect back on how mean oldtimers were to them when they came in. Personally, I believe this has to do a lot with the fact that women are more of a presence in A.A. today. Thirty years ago A.A. was merely on the cusp of it becoming acceptable for a woman to be an alcoholic, and even today many women don't get help because they think their gender sets them apart from what an alcoholic is. In the meeting I attend, nearly one third of the regular participants are women. When I came into A.A., I was greeted with nothing but love and respect from the other women. Had I been met with harshness and austerity, it is likely I would not have returned. I have often wondered if this is because of the difference in relationships between men and women in the program. My relationship with my sponsor is loving and compassionate, but through this, she also holds me accountable for my responsibilities as a member of A.A. (i.e. 12th step work). If she were unpleasant towards

me, I would have a difficult time wanting to work with her. Future research could discover whether this is a personality trait or a gendered identity.

Finally, and similar to this study, I would like to follow a newcomer through their first year of sobriety, documenting literacy use as it occurs. This dissertation study focused greatly on the accuracy of participants in their reflection of how they used literacy throughout their sobriety. For Robert, this meant looking back over more than thirty years. An interesting change in perspective would be to investigate literacy use as it is happening and document how the literacy practice makes the newcomer think, act and believe in the A.A. program. This study could also be used to investigate identity positioning in A.A. to evaluate how the newcomer's views-of-self change as they progress through their first year.

Final Thoughts

On one morning in February as I sat in my morning meeting, I looked around the room and counted the years of sobriety. On that day there was 197 years of sobriety around me. It was a meeting filled with oldtimers and newcomers alike, and it was well-established as one of the longest running meetings in the large southwestern city where my study took place. I got sober in that meeting almost four years ago, and I believe in the messages I have learned there. I also know that it was my own literacy practice in this meeting that led me to want to do the research that was conducted for this study. Not only could I see through my own experience how this research would be important to the academic community, but also how my experiences located me within the recovery

community and granted me a unique insiders position. When I think back on what I learned from Robert, Fred and Janis, I find myself thinking as both the alcoholic and the researcher. Writing their stories and using their words carried the message of A.A. to others in need of recovery but it also provided a landscape rich with data for research. I fulfilled my goal of reaching out to both communities almost unintentionally, and it has only been upon reflection that I can smile and feel confident that both researchers and alcoholics will find use from this work.

The three participants of this study have found ways to use literacy practice to maintain, strengthen and share their sobriety. They listen daily to others in the meeting and speak when it is their turn to share. Twice a week, they read aloud from *The Big Book* and *The Twelve and Twelve*. When they work the steps, they write their moral inventory to share with their sponsor. Janis even has found the time to journal recently, a behavior she adopted again after we completed the study. Almost every day, Robert, Fred and Janis can be found at this same meeting doing what they do best: showing others *how* to stay sober, something they do innately through literacy practice.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS	
Term	**Definition**
Alano Club	The permanent meeting place of Alcoholics Anonymous that is rented and paid for through the 7th tradition.
Bottom	The term used to describe the low point in an alcoholic's life that led them to joining A.A. to get sober. Each alcoholic experiences their own bottom, and no definition has been established as to what exactly this entails.
Elder Statesman	A slang term in A.A. for someone who has a considerable amount of sobriety, usually close to thirty years, does not hold resentments for others, who looks for the wisdom of the group, not the fallacies, and who uses the their experience in the program to exhibit patience and tolerance. See also Oldtimer.
Newcomer	The term used to describe a person who has recently joined A.A. to get sober. A.A. literature does not define a specific time frame in which a person remains a newcomer, and it thus varies for each member.
Oldtimer	A slang term for someone in A.A. who has a considerable amount of time, usually close to thirty years, who guides newcomers through the program and is seen as an example of how to perform in A.A. See also Elder Statesman.
Principles	A reference to The Twelve Principles, which can be found in Figure 4 of this dissertation.
Program	An informal term used to reference Alcoholics Anonymous as a program of recovery.
Promises	A reference to The Twelve Promises, which can be found in Figure 3 of this dissertation.
Qualifying	A term used to describe the way a person in A.A. shares their story with others. The typical structure of a person qualifying includes three parts: what the alcoholic's life was

	like before they joined A.A., what happened that led them want to get sober and join A.A., and what their life is like now in sobriety and as a member of A.A. See also Speaker Meeting.
Speaker Meeting	A regular meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous in which one person is given the opportunity to share their story for approximately ten to fifteen minutes before opening the floor to the stories of other people attending the meeting. See also Qualifying.
Sponsee	The term used to describe a person (see Sponsor) who is under the direction of another member of A.A. for guidance in completing the steps and working the program.
Sponsor	The term used to describe a person who guides and directs another member (see Sponsee) through the steps and helps them to work the program of A.A.
Steps	A reference to The Twelve Steps, which can be found in Figure 1 of this dissertation.
The Big Book	The primary text of A.A. containing instructions and suggestions for working the program and personal stories of some members of A.A.
Traditions	A reference to The Twelve Traditions, which can be found in Figure 2 of this dissertation.

Figure 5: Glossary of terms used in Alcoholics Anonymous as related to this study.

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APPENDIX A

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) is a vastly written about organization. In the beginning of the program, which was founded in 1935, almost all of the texts were written by the organization's founder William Wilson (Bill W.) or by Alcoholics Anonymous World Services. As the program grew, other people began publishing on A.A. as a program of recovery, including one notable author, Ernest Kurtz (1979, 1991), whose *A.A. The Story* and *Not-God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous* are two of the most cited historical accounts of A.A. Biographies about the organization's founders, Bill W. and Robert Smith (Dr. Bob) number in the dozens, and books about the organization in general can be found by the hundreds.

Academic scholars have also chosen to research A.A. from many different perspectives, yet as this theoretical framework and literature review reveal, little to none of that work investigates literacy practice within the program. Because A.A. is centrally founded on anonymity, researchers have had a complicated time gaining access to A.A. meetings and this makes quantitative and ethnographic work in the program difficult. It is not only difficult to be accepted into a meeting as a researcher, it is also difficult to find members who are willing to be the subjects of a research study because of the tradition of anonymity. Thus, my identity as a member of A.A. and as an academic researcher became valuable and useful in gaining access to the program and its members. This insider perspective gave me the ability to conduct research in A.A. that, for the most part, has never been conducted before.

There are two purposes to this dissertation study. First, I hope to expand the field of literacy research, especially on a topic where so little prior work has been done. Second, I hope the alternative format of this study will appeal to a wider audience, including those in need of recovery, so as to exhibit how literacy practice can be used to strengthen, maintain and teach sobriety within the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. As a result, the following research questions guided this study:

1. How is literacy enacted by members in Alcoholics Anonymous?

2. How is literacy used to craft identity in Alcoholics Anonymous?

3. How does literacy impact the lives of members of Alcoholics Anonymous?

The theoretical framework for this study situates literacy within the sociocultural perspective. Using this frame, the three most relevant topics I considered when addressing my research questions were language, identity and Discourse. When I began to look for literature about A.A. related to these topics, I had a difficult time locating anything that didn't relate to alcoholism as a disease. The body of work from the medical field in relation to the disease was expansive. As this appendix reveals, however, there has been no research, especially in the last ten years, related to the specialist language of A.A., nor has there been any work completed in relation to Discourse.

Theoretical Framework

During my four years of graduate work, my definition of literacy has changed drastically. In my first semester, I defined literacy to my advisor as "reading and writing." She immediately corrected me and informed me that literacy was much more

than just the act of reading and writing. At the time I had a very difficult time understanding what she meant. If someone is said to be illiterate, does it not mean they are without literacy and are therefore unable to read and write? It was this kind of thinking that led me to believe that literacy was only practiced through these two actions. It has been through the process of coursework, comprehensive exams and writing this dissertation that I have gained a much more worldly understanding of what literacy (and thus the act of being literate) means. For me, this naturally grew to involve the sociocultural perspective. My interpretation of literacy from the sociocultural perspective is exactly as it says: both social and cultural.

What is meant by social or cultural may not be clear. I define the term social as any interaction between two individuals or an individual and others. This can be through speaking, reading, listening, texting, emailing, writing, body language, or any other exchange between two or more people. The focus is on the interaction that is taking place rather than on the medium through which communication occurs. The term cultural I define as a set of shared belief systems and values that are present in a specific setting. Peter Smagorinsky (2001) defined culture as "the recurring social practices and their artifacts that give order, purpose, and continuity to social life" (p. 139), and I agree with this, too. For the purpose of this study, I narrowed the focus of these definitions so as to be more appropriate to the context of A.A. and the literacy practices that are the most prominent within the program. Thus, to me, a sociocultural perspective of literacy encompasses the way an individual uses listening, speaking, reading and writing, to

express their values, beliefs and identities in their interactions with others in order to gain knowledge, communicate, interpret, and make decisions specific to the social and cultural contexts of Alcoholics Anonymous. This was why language, identity and Discourse became the three focal points of this study.

It has been said that the foundation of the sociocultural theory rests on the ideas of theorist Lev Vygotsky. (McLeod, 2007). Little is known about the life of Lev Vygotsky, but much has been said about his work on the sociocultural perspective. Many of Vygotsky's ideas about psychology stem from original works by philosophers like Marx and Engels whose ideas about social systems and developments of human societies explain the importance of the social environment to Vygotskian theory (Montero & Rosa, 1990). However, Vygotsky did not come to familiarize himself with such philosophers by studying philosophy or psychology. Rather, "his interest in psychology was stimulated, at least in part, by his literary concerns" as he tried to negotiate how the social and cultural environment around a person influenced their ability to retain information (Montero & Rosa, 1990, p. 74). "Vygotsky's notion that thinking has social origins involves a cultural and historical perspective on what it means to be "social." [I]t implies that even when people are alone, their thinking involves a sort of dialogue with others, including those long gone" (Smagorinsky, 2007, p. 62). Vygotskian theory focuses on how existing knowledge influences learning. In the context of this dissertation, Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) participant volunteers entered the study with extensive amounts of preexisting knowledge which they used to negotiate what it meant to be a member of A.A. and

determine the best process for them to acquire the language, identities and Discourse of the community.

Vygotskian theories make us think about how we view learning in terms of the type of knowledge we already have. “Sociocultural approaches to learning…are based on the concept that human activities take place in cultural contexts, are mediated by language and other symbol systems and can best be understood when investigated in their historical development” (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p.191). Vygotsky’s ideas shifted modern learning theory from an individualistic approach in which the learner was a sponge meant to soak up content, to the sociocultural approach in which the environment around a learner became crucial to learning and development, including “signs, symbols [and] texts” (Kouzlin, 2003, p. 15). The previous individualistic approach to learning was merely a transmission of content knowledge from the teacher to the student. The learner in the individualistic scenario has no frame of reference for the content; the information the learner needs has been pre-determined, and it is thus imparted onto him or her without qualms about background knowledge or life experience. This is not how Vygotsky saw learning. “Unlike the individualistic theory of learning, the Vygotskian approach emphasizes the importance of sociocultural forces in shaping the situation of a child’s development and learning, and it points to the crucial role played by parents, teachers, peers and the community” (Kouzlin et al, 2003). In recent years, many scholars and academics have drawn on Vygotsky’s work to inform their own work. Today, literacy is often looked at from a social and cultural perspective. Studies on literacy practices now

involve the way we function in the many different facets of our lives— school, work, family, online, in sports, religion, ethnic practice, etc. For the purpose of this dissertation, I have developed my own definition of literacy from the sociocultural perspective based on Vygotskian theory and the work of scholar James Paul Gee. Both of these authors' theories have contributed extensively to my understanding of the sociocultural perspective in the field of literacy pedagogy. In addition to this, the literature presented in this appendix related specifically to A.A. makes relevant the ways in which the sociocultural perspective of literacy is related to language, identity and Discourse within the program and through the members of A.A.

James Paul Gee's (2004, 2007, 2009, 2011) work in the areas of language, identity and Discourse were especially relevant because his publications made applicable the argument in favor of the sociocultural perspective where literacy and learning was concerned. Gee examines extensively what it means for a person to be literate from a sociocultural perspective, stating that "people are (or are not) literate (partially or fully) in a domain if they can recognize (the equivalent of "reading") and/or produce (the equivalent of "writing") meanings in the domain" (Gee, 2007). Being literate is about being able to recognize and create meaning–even if it not done in traditional ways with text on paper. In an Alano Club, literacy practice is multi-faceted. The participants of this study used listening, speaking, reading and writing to negotiate their interactions with other members and potential members of the program in order to create meaning about their recovery and role in A.A. While A.A. does not necessarily require members to write

out their comprehension of the *Big Book*, members are expected to contribute to meetings through a series of discussions, behaviors and services using the appropriate language and Discourse.

Literature Review

When I began the search for academic, peer-reviewed literature about 12-step programs, the results numbered over 100,000 articles. After limiting the search to only articles related to A.A., I was still left with more than 20,000 publications. In order to manage the quantity of these articles and books, I had to set some parameters for what type of literature I would be reviewing in relation to A.A. I decided on three distinct constraints for my search. First, this literature review examines texts that are related only to the organization Alcoholics Anonymous, not alcoholism as a medical condition or from the medical field. The second parameter was that the works about A.A. had to be written about a qualitative study of some type, preferably ethnography. There was no question that A.A. as an organization and a program of recovery was a phenomenon that occurred within a particular cultural setting or group. This made ethnographic and qualitative methods appropriate for researching A.A. in the social sciences. This restriction also eliminated much of the work in the medical field as it tended to be quantitative and heavy in statistical data, especially in relation to relapse rates. The final restriction I set was that the date of the pieces I reviewed about A.A. had to be published during or after the year 2000. This eliminated a plethora of work that was completed in the middle of the twentieth century that related to outdated medical studies about A.A.

without eliminating much work in my area of study. The only exceptions for which this constraint was ignored for the purpose of this review was in the cases of several books written about identity from the mid to late 1990s that were also cited by more recent pieces and still fell within the other two parameters I had established. As a result of this literature survey, Appendix A is organized around the three themes of language, identity and Discourse. Each section of this literature review will evaluate how language, identity or Discourse is used in A.A. therefore constructing this study around the sociocultural perspective of literacy, particularly in the ways members of the program use listening, speaking, reading and writing to negotiate these topics.

Specialist Language. As people negotiate their involvement within different social groups, they adopt various languages that are specific to the discourse of each group. This language is considered 'special' to each group. According to Gee (2009) specialist language is "used for special purposes and activities (p. 17). Within specialist language Gee defines two categories: academic and non-academic. Academic specialist language is reserved for "school-based content" like "biology, physics, law, or literary criticism" (Gee, 2004, p. 15). Non-academic specialist language is what one would find in an A.A. meeting. As with any social group, A.A. uses specialist language as a means for communicating discourse within the group. "Specialist languages are tied to socially situated identities and activities" (Gee, 2004, p. 85). Also according to Gee (2004), a person cannot adopt a new specialist language unless they view it as some kind of improvement to their current situation. He continues by saying:

> People can only see a new specialist language as a gain if: (a) they recognize and understand the sorts of socially situated identities and activities that recruit the specialist language; (b) they value these identities and activities, or at least understand why they are valued; and (c) they believe they (will) have real access to these identities and activities, or at least (will) have access to meaningful (perhaps simulated) versions of them. (p. 85)

Each of these elements is made possible by a person's involvement in A.A. For someone attending an A.A. meeting for the first time, much of what is said in a meeting might actually sound like a foreign language. The words are English, but the way they are strung together would make little sense to someone without the discourse to understand them. Perhaps newcomers could make inferences as to what is being said, but they could not know for sure until they, too, have adopted the vocabulary and made an adaptation to their own language to truly determine the correct meanings in this Discourse. The definitions of the terminology in A.A. are determined by their usage. They are not new words, but the way in which the words are arranged into phrases creates new meaning for people within the group. An example of specialist language in A.A. is the way in which members talk about someone who has relapsed through the use of the term "went back out." If, in an A.A. meeting, someone said he "went back out" the members of the group would know that person has relapsed. The term "went back out" means he started drinking again, as in "he went back out to a bar." Outside of a meeting and outside of the setting of A.A., though, there would be no connection to a relapse. The term must be

situated within a specific context for it to have the special meaning it intends. Another example is the way A.A. members talk about 'the' program. Often it is referenced only as "program" as in "She works a good program" or "No, he's not in program" or "I had a bad day, I didn't' follow program very well." In these cases, there is no definite article placed before the word program, making it sound like a proper noun, like a place or being that exists outside of the person speaking about it.

Because specialist language is so vast in A.A., a glossary has been included in this dissertation to help guide the reader through some of these terms (See Figure 5). Words like qualifying, speaker, bottom and promises are examples of the specialist language found in the glossary. Each of these terms has a very clear meaning within mainstream American society. They also carry a different meaning in A.A. in relation to qualifying to be in the program, speakers at meetings, reaching a bottom to get sober and following The Twelve Promises. Much of the specialist language in A.A. is also related directly to the topic of identity which will be discussed in the next section of this appendix. People like newcomers, oldtimers, sponsors and sponsees all carry a very specific role in A.A., but do so through labels that only someone part of the Discourse in A.A. could understand. This specialist language indicates that the interpretation of language is situated within the context of a specific social setting.

Identity. I define identity as the way that any person uses language and behaviors within a particular group. For every social group to which one belongs, there are certain identities one must enact in order to be considered a valuable member of that community.

Identities manifest in the way a person portrays him or herself within the group so as to be recognized as having the "right or "appropriate" identity" (Gee, 2009, p. 106). It is about learning what one group values as the right way to act and behave in different situations within the group, and then following this model appropriately (Gee, 2004).

Identities are always shifting and changing. A grad student, for example, could enact multiple identities at once including teacher, student, researcher, and writer. One begins as a first-year student taking certain coursework that is appropriate to one's program, and ends the last years as 'all but dissertation' or ABD. Within each of these versions of identity, there are particular characteristics one might portray, from conducting interviews, to writing term papers to grading undergraduate homework. However regardless of how one positions one's self at any given moment, the broader identity of graduate student is still present.

In A.A., there is a similar structure to identity. When a person makes the decision to get sober in A.A., he or she leaves behind the identity of a drinking alcoholic and identity shifts into a non-drinking alcoholic (Holland et al, 1998). The newly sober alcoholic must unlearn the beliefs held as a drinking alcoholic in order to learn (or relearn in the case of relapses) what is important as a non-drinking alcoholic. He or she must seek a new identity of a sober alcoholic or a member of A.A. This means changing current thoughts and beliefs about almost everything in life— drinking habits, relationships with others, jobs, moral defects, etc., so that the new non-drinking alcoholic can dedicate him or herself to living a sober life and working the program of A.A. A

person who decides to get sober has to become willing to learn and as Gee (2007) says, "People cannot learn in a deep way within a semiotic domain if they are not willing to commit themselves fully to the learning in terms of time, effort, and active engagement" (p. 54). Especially in the case where anonymity is key, the newly recovering alcoholic leaves behind previously developed everyday identities in order to be and to perform as non-drinking alcoholic member of A.A. This performance, like the graduate student, involves many different sub-identities that occur within the larger identity of being a member of A.A. These identities might include newcomer, oldtimer, sponsor, sponsee or speaker. Like the example of the graduate student, at any given moment, the alcoholic, while enacting these many sub-identities, also enacts the larger, broader identity of A.A. member. These are considered individual identities vs. group identities.

Individual identities in A.A. Within these different identities in A.A., the alcoholics "use language to be recognized as taking on a certain identity or role" (Gee, 2011, p. 106). The relationship between a newcomer and an oldtimer, in particular, thrives on this exchange of language in order for the two groups to enact the identities mentioned here. By listening and speaking to one another and reading and writing together, the oldtimer and the newcomer portray their identities in a similar way to teacher and student or preacher and congregation. Members of A.A., particularly when enacting these identities, use"…stretches of language which "hang together" so as to make sense to some community of people such as a contribution to a conversation or

story" (Gee, 2009, p. 115). The importance of this is that literacy practice plays a crucial role in how individual identities are enacted within A.A.

No two A.A. meetings are the same, and this makes research of a "typical" individual identity in A.A. difficult. In one meeting held on Friday nights in Southern California, the makeup of the group is of wealthy business men and women, each with more than three years of sobriety (Ratliff, 2003). Many of the people in this group have also been able to afford psychotherapy, which changes the way they look at recovery. Therefore, the identity of the members of the group is not solely based in A.A., but also on their identities as patients. As one member's narrative recorded, the group is "isolated" (Ratliff, 2003, p. 43). Within this group, the author witnesses the ways in which identity is negotiated in A.A. Ratliff (2003) writes that:

> "[S]ystematic observation resulted in an explanation of A.A.'s success more as a surrogate community for its members in terms of its ability to provide people at a critical point in their lives an opportunity to enter into an open-ended process of the negotiation of the restructuring of their individual identity through the process of their integration into a new kind of community" (p. 44).

A.A. has the ability to do this because each group is constantly adapting and changing to the individual needs of that group. For Ratliff's group in Southern California, this means allowing the conversation to take an orientation towards psychotherapy. For other groups, it might mean recruiting more newcomers, changing the meeting dynamics

or meeting more than one day a week. The point is that each group and each member of each group has an identity that is constantly changing.

Every person's recovery in A.A. is different in the same way that no two people do exactly the same job. I might be a teacher and so might my best friend, but we will have different pedagogy, different teaching styles and different cultural backgrounds to bring to our classrooms. People in A.A. are all alcoholics, but the path they take through recovery is made up of many decisions about the type of recovering alcoholic they are going to be. Hoffman (2003) breaks down these various recovery career pathways into three sections: insiders, graduates and relapses. Within the insider section, there are five separate individual identities: regulars, elder statesmen, circuit speakers, bleeding deacons, and rank/file members (p. 662). According to Hoffman (2003) each of these describes a different path a person who enters A.A. can take:

> Regulars are the "wallflowers" of the program; they frequently attend AA meetings, but their presence is not obvious, for they remain on the sidelines of the program without actively participating in meetings. The Rank and File members are the "workhorses" who perform a majority of the service activities that are necessary for AA to sustain itself. The Bleeding Deacon is the authoritative and moralistic AA veteran, usually with 15-30 years of sobriety, who takes it upon *himself* (this career is typically occupied by men, but I have observed at least one woman in this role) to preserve the normative boundaries of the AA program. The Elder Statesman, in contrast, is the highly respected member who is revered for

> his or her wisdom and who often helps to manage inter- and intrapersonal conflicts of other members. It is the Statesman and sometimes the Deacon who enjoy the status of Circuit Speakers who travel to AA groups and related conventions to tell their recovery stories." (p. 654).

It is important to note the social and cultural implications these individual identities have on one's position in A.A. The category a person falls into characterizes the way in which they are viewed by the rest of A.A. community. For example, bleeding deacons, who are old-timers that are bitter about changes in A.A., think they know everything about the organization and are quick to chastise newcomers when they are wrong, tend to be viewed negatively by the rest of the group. The label 'bleeding deacon' is not a positive one in A.A. and translates to other members that the person is one to steer clear from especially if you are a newcomer (Hoffman, 2003). Interestingly, Hoffman (2003) does not include the individual identity of newcomer despite the fact that he uses the term several times throughout the article.

Sponsorship in A.A. also manifests through different individual identities in A.A. Members are expected to be both sponsors and sponsees throughout their recovery. There is some literature about the notion of sponsorship in A.A. Ratliff (2003) discusses sponsorship as crafting identity through "mutual support and collective healing" (p. 47). Through sponsorship, the newcomer and the oldtimer each create an identity, one in support of the other. The sponsor becomes the teacher, the leader, the guide for the newcomer. In turn, the newcomer becomes somewhat of an apprentice to the old-timer

(Lave & Wenger, 1991). This idea of apprenticeship in A.A. is related to the overall "practice and identities" of the community that makes up A.A. (p. 79). The newcomer gets a sponsor, and the sponsor teaches the newcomer how to act, think and behave within the organization. Thus, the sponsor helps the newcomer develop their identity and discourse in A.A. In turn, the sponsee is then expected to become a sponsor and take on their own apprentice in the program. An interesting perspective is the way in which identity is acquired in A.A. through the admission of poor behavior indicating a drinking problem (the 1st step of A.A.) and by learning new ways to behave through not drinking at all. In other words, "[t]he A.A. identity requires a behavior— not drinking— which is a negation of the behavior which originally qualified one for membership" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 81). Sponsorship helps the apprentice (read newcomer or sponsee) shed the old identity as a problem drinker and transition into the new, broader identity of a non-drinker. Communication between the sponsor and the apprentice make up the structural foundation for A.A. (Witmer, 2009). Through this interaction, the individual identities in A.A. help to strengthen and fortify the group identity of alcoholic.

Group identity in A.A. Cain (1991, Holland et al, 1998) argues in two publications that the broad identity of alcoholic acquired in A.A. occurs through the process of storytelling. She discusses the ways in which people joining A.A. go from being "drinking non-alcoholics to non-drinking alcoholics" (Cain, 1991, p. 210). Cain believes the identity acquisition of an alcoholic in A.A. does not take place until the person admits to having a problem. Without this component, the person is only

considered an alcoholic by what society deems appropriate based on deviant behavior and life issues. Once a person admits they are an alcoholic and accepts the label of alcoholic in A.A., they immediately begin to take on a new identity. This identity is further formed as they listen to stories of other members that they can identify with (Cain, 1991). The main text for A.A., *Alcoholics Anonymous* or *The Big Book* also includes a chapter titled "Working with Others" which gives general instructions about how members should share their stories. "Describe yourself as an alcoholic," it says. (A.A., 2001, p.91). This deliberate instruction tells the alcoholic to put their identity into their own words and share it with others.

Cain's (1998) chapter in *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* discusses the process that an alcoholic goes through while forming an identity in A.A. Acquisition of identity in A.A. occurs, according to Cain, when the old identity, often related to negative behaviors goes through a process of "devaluation" (Holland, et al, 1998, p. 73). Then, new behaviors and beliefs replace the old, discourse is imparted on the new non-drinking alcoholic, and an emotional attachment begins to form between the alcoholic and the organization. The emotional attachment is crucial to the alcoholic believing their new identity is valuable and authentic. According to Cain, identity acquisition in A.A. requires these two phases: admitting to being an alcoholic (an irreversible state of mind in A.A.) and committing to being a non-drinker. The first phase of identity acquisition is uncontrollable by A.A.'s terms. The second phase is controllable by the alcoholic. They can either not drink, or drink, but the choice will affect their identity in A.A. Through this

model of identity acquisition, Cain points out the importance of a higher power in A.A. because only a higher power can help and alcoholic control the urge to drink (Holland et al, 1998). This strengthening of the non-drinker's group identity as an alcoholic makes them a more authentic storyteller when they begin speaking at meetings for A.A.

Storytelling in A.A. is also a part of the group identity because every member of A.A. is expected to do so as part of the 12th step. Storytelling is intended to "share experience strength and hope with each other in order to stay sober and help other alcoholics" (A.A., 2001, p. xxiv). This action in A.A. is crucial to the way the program succeeds, and is the primary way by which members carry the message of A.A. (the 12th step) to one another. Fischer (1987) argued that "[m]embers of Alcoholics Anonymous 'tell their stories' as a way of knowing and achieving understanding of themselves, their alcoholism, and their paths to recovery" (as cited in Witmer, 2009, p. 328). Storytelling in A.A. allows the member to establish an identity as someone who belongs in the group. In a way, these narratives serve as a sort of qualification for inclusion and acceptance within the group (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

In Jensen's *Storytelling in Alcoholics Anonymous* (2000), a model is laid out for how identity is transferred through narrative in A.A. Storytelling, according to Jensen is about the speaker speaking *for* an audience, not *before* them (p. 70). The speaker explains their experiences as an alcoholic as a method of teaching those in the room what they did to find recovery. The message of the story is intended to help others through one's identity as an alcoholic, not preach at them about the steps or the actual processes of A.A.

Those topics are reserved for sponsorship, which is made up of individual identities, not the group identity of storyteller. Instead, Jensen, in a way, mystifies the speaker, comparing the speaker to a hero and is reminiscent of Joseph Campbell's *Journey Inward* in which a bottom must be reached in order for a person, a hero, to obtain salvation (Campbell, 1988). Through storytelling, members are the heroes of A.A., sharing their personal stories of hopelessness and despair in order to show how they achieved salvation in recovery (Jensen, 2000). In the setting of A.A., the intensity of storytelling creates an atmosphere of authenticity. The speaker is not trying to impress the audience, and in fact, "in a room where people are laughing one moment and crying the next, there is less pressure to "bullshit" others" (Jensen, 2000, p. 93). Storytelling may also be the first time an alcoholic feels a true sense of identity since quitting drinking. Knapp (1997) argues that "drinking interferes with the larger, murkier business of *identity*, or forming a sense of self as strong and capable and aware" (p. 80). Literature shows that the group identity of the alcoholic is solidified through the telling of one's narrative in A.A.

Discourse. Discourses are made up of the way people use language, interaction, behavior and literacy practice to enact certain acceptable identities within a social group. Gee (2003), was interested in what was termed "recognition." He learned how much work people put into getting recognized by others as having some kind of identity within a particular group, and he later coined the term big "D" Discourses to show how these socially recognized identities existed within certain contexts. (p. 6). He (2003) defined Discourses as:

> "…ways of using language, acting, interacting, valuing, dressing, thinking, believing, and feeling (or displaying these), as well as ways of interacting with various objects, tools, artifacts, technologies, spaces, and times so as to seek to get recognized as having a specific socially consequential identity" (p. 7)

The study of this phenomenon is called discourse analysis. Gee (2011) "sees discourse analysis as tied closely to the details of language structure (grammar) but that deals with meaning in social, cultural, and political terms, a broader approach to meaning than is common in much mainstream linguistics" (p. ix) This is relevant to the purpose of this study in that the research methods seek to reveal how members of the social group A.A. use not only language structure, but also literacy practice to perform various identities within the Discourse of A.A.

When people are communicating, there is always some motive beyond just the language they are using. Communication intends meaning, including the way a person thinks, acts and believes. Within specific social settings, appropriate communication displays membership within the Discourse of that group. Being a part of a Discourse requires a person to know the language of that community so as to say the right things in combination with knowing the belief and values of that community so as to do the right things (Gee, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2011). Everyone acquires a primary Discourse as part of their upbringing. Primary discourses, which are the valued behaviors we enact that make us an everyday person, are acquired through the process of our upbringing. Secondary Discourses, however, are Discourses we acquire as we negotiate various identities in

socially recognizable groups. Secondary Discourses differ from the primary vernacular while also using certain values from the primary Discourse as a means of identity negotiation (i.e., what it means to be polite). According to Gee (2009b), "…all these secondary Discourses involve uses of language, either written or oral, or both, as well as ways of thinking, valuing, and behaving, which go beyond the uses of language in our primary Discourses" (p. 174). It is this process that allows a person to go beyond being just an everyday person and become a part of some other Discourse. Secondary Discourses are acquired within the "public sphere", and are a compilation of all the many different socially recognizable groups that exist within our larger society (Gee, 2009b, p. 157). As people grow and develop, they become a part of multiple secondary Discourses in addition to their primary Discourse. Primary Discourses always impact a person's secondary Discourse on some level. Using the politeness example, members of A.A. use what they know about how to act like an everyday person from their primary Discourse to treat each other respectfully and politely.

Secondary Discourses are "acquired within institutions that are part and parcel of wider communities, whether these be religious groups, community organizations, schools, businesses, or governments" (Gee, 2009a, p. 11). In the context of this dissertation, A.A., including every individual identity that a person enacts within it, is considered a secondary Discourse. This is to say that a person picks up a Discourse not by consciously studying it and trying to become a part of it, but rather by developing into a part of the Discourse through identity acquisition and language use. In some ways, this

Discourse acquisition occurs as a process of trial and error (Gee, 2009b). “The behaviors of any individual person, at a specific time and place, are meaningful only against the Discourse that can “recognize” and give “meaning” and “value to that behavior” (Gee, 2009b, p. 194). If a person exhibits behaviors that are not valued within the Discourse, then they hold little to no meaning within the group. Therefore, a person learns how to act in a Discourse based on what is valued by that group. This is how people acquire a Discourse. According to Gee (2009a), this meaning is determined by the social community, which is often based on historical trends. “Meaning is something we negotiate and contest over socially. It is something that has its roots in “culture” in the very deep and extended sense that it resides in an attempt to find common ground” (Gee, 2009b, p. 13). All

Within A.A. there are certain ways of thinking, acting, speaking, listening and believing that are appropriate and accepted by the group as a whole. For example, it is socially appropriate in A.A. for oldtimers to take on newcomers as sponsees. This sponsor to sponsee relationship holds many meanings in terms of Discourse. First, it is a gendered practice where men typically work with men and women typically work with women. Second, it holds a hierarchical structure to it. The sponsor is expected to share knowledge about the program with the sponsee to teach them how to work the program of A.A. This includes the way a sponsor takes a sponsee through the steps and what type of service work a sponsee might be expected to do. In terms of thinking and believing, there is an unspoken respect and unquestionable faith placed in the sponsor by the

sponsee. It is part of the Discourse for the sponsee to take the suggestions of the sponsor without argument in order for the sponsee to stay sober. The exchange of language between the two is also a part of the Discourse. The sponsor will often use imperative language, saying things like, "sit down, shut up and listen" or give the directive to read a certain page out of the book. It would not be appropriate for the sponsee to speak to the sponsor in the same way. Instead, the sponsee's language would be more complementary and appreciative of the suggestions their sponsor is giving them. The sponsee is expected to hold a certain level of respect for their sponsor and trust that their guidance is what is going to help the sponsee stay sober. These concrete ways of thinking, acting, and believing through language use are all a part of the way A.A Discourse functions.

Discourse also plays a role in the way a newcomer in the program negotiates the way they become a member of the group. Ratliff (2003) acknowledged two distinct Discourses, each at war with the other, in the meeting he observed in his study about group identity. These were psychological Discourse and spiritual Discourse. The psychological Discourse gives the group he observed the identity of 'pushing' as in pushing forward for self-empowerment, or pushing against the need for support from others. Newcomers who perform within this Discourse have a difficult time coming to terms with their new identity of alcoholic. They want to resist the inevitable solution of giving up alcohol forever. The spiritual Discourse gives the identity of a group that is 'pulling' as in pulling in virtue, asking for acceptance, reaching out for a higher power. These newcomers have hit a point in their drinking where there is nowhere else for them

to go. They must get sober. This paradigm is a difficult one for many people who are new to A.A. The Discourse of A.A. requires they begin to acknowledge themselves in the constant state of the disease; according to A.A. there is no cure for the disease of alcoholism, so crafting an identity of a life-long alcoholic is an arduous one for some (Ratliff, 2003). All participants of this dissertation, already being established members of A.A., have acquired the spiritual Discourse of the program and pull for acceptance and spirituality daily as a part of their recovery.

People also participate in Discourses to show what they are trying to do in terms of what socially situated behavior they are attempting to portray. As Gee says, "language is not enough for this" (Gee, 2009a, p. 7). In order to show who they are and what they are trying to do, a person must be able to show how language exhibits what they value, what feelings they have, what other interactions or people they know and how to employ each of this in a specific setting. In A.A. this is similar to the Discourse members of A.A. display while in a meeting verses how the behave outside the physical context of an Alano club. In both settings the alcoholic does not drink alcohol, but in one the member of A.A. may be comfortable admitting to their disease where in the other they prefer to preserve their identity. Gee discusses that, "when you act in (or think in terms of) the role of someone else, this involves not merely taking on a new identity but sometimes thinking and valuing from a perspective that you or others may think "wrong" from a different perspective" (Gee, 2007, p. 149). This is related to the way a newcomer might feel when first going into A.A. Even though they are taking on the role of recovering

alcoholic, it still might make them feel uncomfortable or might go against something they previously believed about what it meant to be an alcoholic. This may also be true for the oldtimers who staunchly protect their anonymity. Within a meeting of A.A., they may feel their identity as an alcoholic is protected and safe, while outside of a meeting, they feel embarrassment, shame or humiliation. Gee discusses that cultural groups do not often even consider these conflicting roles until one of them becomes threatened. While these individual and group identities within Discourse mostly exist subconsciously in our heads, they can become a conscious part of the social group if they need to be protected. Essentially, this is how the social group protects its own Discourse (Gee, 2007).

Discourses are a result of historical trends (Gee, 2009, 2011). A.A. is a social group that is less than 100 years old. Yet, over the last seventy-five years, the types of language and behavior that are appropriate in the program is a function of what every person in the Discourse historically deemed appropriate. The founding members of A.A. wrote The Twelve Steps, and they have thus become a historically significant part of the program that drives the way members of Discourse practice sobriety. The same can be said for *The Big Book* which holds value in the program today because it has historically been used and authenticated as the primary text of A.A. This is how the Discourse of a social group is developed. In the context of this study, meaning is determined by what members of A.A. have grown to value over its more than seventy-five years of Discourse development.

Conclusion

Alcoholism is not an under-researched topic. Medical fields have capitalized on the disease aspect of alcoholism, creating a large body of research on the topic. The more specific topic of Alcoholics Anonymous, particularly the way language, identity and Discourse are present in the group, is not as vastly a covered topic.

Specialist language is closely tied to becoming familiar with the social and cultural conventions within a particular social group. Becoming familiar with the specialist language of A.A. is a crucial component of membership. A newcomer in A.A. will spend part of the time in this identity struggling to understand some of what is said in A.A. meetings because they are not yet familiar with the appropriate language within the group. This feeling of outsider will subside as they begin to acquire the language through interaction and communication with other members of the group. Specialist language in A.A. also ties into identity because many of the labels members of the program carry relate to the roles they fulfill within the group. This is certainly true of the newcomer, who, while becoming familiar with the appropriate terms in A.A., = is also becoming familiar with what it means to be someone new in the program.

Identity in A.A. can be broken into two distinct groups. First, members as a whole enact a group identity that classifies them as an alcoholic in recovery through the means of A.A. This group identity is usually enacted as the alcoholic admits they have a problem with alcohol and begin to commit to the lifestyle and beliefs of a non-drinker. The group identity of an alcoholic in A.A. is also enacted through the process of

storytelling. All members, as a part of The Twelve Steps, are expected to share their stories with others in order to help other alcoholics either get or stay sober. Storytelling in A.A. is part of the group identity because it is a role that all members act in within the group. It is a Discourse practice.

Individual identity within A.A. is the second classification of identity. This consists of all the ways an A.A. member enacts various sub-identities as a part of their membership in the group. This includes many different identities, some of them being newcomers, oldtimers, elder statesmen, and bleeding deacons. Sponsorship is also a part of individual identity in A.A. a people take on the role of sponsor and sponsee or both.

Discourse within the context of A.A. plays a large role in the ways members interact with one another. This Discourse is embedded in the historical practices of A.A. and has developed out of the beliefs of what A.A. should or should not be over the last seventy-five years. In the larger scale of Discourse, members of A.A. face the paradigms of primary vs. secondary Discourses, psychological vs. spiritual Discourses, and inside vs. outside Discourses. A.A. members acquire the secondary Discourse of the program so they can participate in the spiritual Discourse and practice what it means to be an insider within the group. The overall Discourse of A.A. is acquired through practice, communication and interaction. A person comes to be in A.A. because of their participation within the group and their attendance at meetings.

Language, identity and Discourse situate learning within a sociocultural context of A.A. Without culture and social interaction, it would be impossible to develop various

uses of language across different settings. These social settings, like those found in the context of A.A., play a crucial role in how people learn to use literacy practice to benefit their communication and interactions with others within the Discourse of A.A.

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

This chapter is an overview of the analytical tools and research methods that I employed to best investigate my research questions for this dissertation. These questions are:

1. How is literacy enacted by members in Alcoholics Anonymous?

2. How is literacy used to craft identity in Alcoholics Anonymous?

3. How does literacy impact the lives of members of Alcoholics Anonymous?

I will first explain the recruitment procedures I used to gather participants and the process of selecting interviewees from the pool of possible participants. This section will also include the ethical measures that were used to protect their anonymity. Next, I will describe the in-depth the interview process that was used for this study, including a description of the scaffolding criteria that took place throughout this process. Following the interview procedure, I describe how the data was used to construct a chronological life-history for each participant. Third, I will explain how a deep analysis was performed to pull out only pieces of the interview transcripts that used my definition of literacy from a sociocultural perspective and how this more manageable data was broken into themes relating to literacy practices in A.A. I then describe how discourse analysis was used to analyze and investigate theses literacy practices. This chapter concludes with insight into the validity and reliability of the study, and also the limitations that were faced.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

This study was based 100% on participant volunteers. Interviewees were recruited from one Alano club (a permanent meeting place of Alcoholics Anonymous) in a large southwestern city in the United States. Announcements were made at one meeting per day for one week requesting any volunteers for the study. Interested participants were instructed to call, e-mail or speak in person with the researcher. A flyer requesting participation was also pinned to an announcement board located just inside the entrance of the club. The anticipated sample size for this study was no more than 10, and at the conclusion of recruitment, a total of six members of A.A. had volunteered to participate. To follow Seidman's (1998) model, I selected participants who were different enough that the largest population possible would be able to relate to the findings of this study. Therefore, of the six participants who volunteered, three were selected based on variation in years of sobriety and gender. This resulted in two male and one female participants, with sobriety varying from one year to thirty-two years. Upon distribution of the letter of consent for the study, I began to take certain measures to protect the anonymity of the participants. First, participants were asked to select pseudonyms to be used in the study as a replacement for their real names. The participants were not only been given a self-chosen pseudonym, but were also given a draft of their chapter to edit and adjust anywhere they felt their anonymity had come into question. Several changes were made at the request of each participant, and upon publication, all three were comfortable with the measures that had been taken to protect their identities.

Interviews

For this study, I followed the three-part interview method that educational researcher Irving Seidman outlined in his book *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. "This method combines life-history interviewing and focused, in-depth interviewing by assumptions drawn from phenomenology" (Seidman, 1998, p. 9). Just as epistemology is the study of knowledge and how we know, phenomenology is the study of our experience and how we experience. In the context of this study, interviews drew on how the participants have experienced life as alcoholic, and how in sobriety, literacy practice was related to such. As the interviewer, I explored the literacy use of each participant as related to A.A. by investigating the tangible experiences of the participants and the meanings these experiences had for each of them. "In this approach interviewers use, primarily, open-ended questions. Their major task is to build upon and explore their participants' responses to those questions. The goal is to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study" (Seidman, 1998, p. 9). The stories of members of A.A., being a prominent part of A.A. in general, provided a sufficient tool for uncovering the ways the participants used literacy practices in A.A, thus allowing others, whether academic or otherwise, to connect to these experiences.

Each interview served a separate yet meaningful purpose. The interviews built on each other, so structure was important to scaffold the content from interview to interview. Each interview was spaced three days to one week apart, again according to Seidman's

model. This gave the participants enough time to reflect on the previous interview but not enough time for them to feel disconnected from the process. This time frame also allowed me to establish a substantial relationship with the participant as well as time to evaluate the data from one interview before moving on to the next. It is important to note that throughout this process, I was not trying to test hypotheses or prove that literacy practice existed in A.A. This was already known. Instead, "at the root of in-depth interviewing [was] an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 1998, p.3)

Three Interview Process. Using Seidman's model, I conducted three 90-minute interviews with each participant. The first interview was centered around the participant's life story. It was intended to be a reconstruction of the participant's life up to the current moment in light of the topic of the research, literacy practice in Alcoholics Anonymous. Each participant was instructed to share as much detail as they could from their earliest memory to the present moment regardless of the fact that they were alcoholic. It was important to find out as much as I could about them up to the present in order to be able to reconstruct their life-history as the second section of each data chapter. In this first interview, questions focused on school, family, neighborhood, work, friends, etc. The purpose of this interview was not to learn what literacy practices the participants used in A.A., but how they came to know and understand their life experiences in general.

The purpose of the second interview was to find out more about the concrete details of the participant's experience within the context of the study. Questions for this

interview used the experiences that were shared in the first interview to create a more context specific inquiry. For example, if the interviewee shared that they received their first copy of the *The Big* Book in rehab, the second interview would be used to gather more information about this experience and why it was important enough to mention in the first interview. This was the place in the interview process where I asked specific questions about their literacy practice based on the experiences they had. Focusing on past experiences relating to literacy, this interview probed how the participants came to practice literacy in the context of A.A., including questions specific to each participant's individual literacy practices (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, writing, etc.).

The third interview was about making meaning. The interviewee was asked about the meaning of their experiences related to their literacy practice in A.A. An example of this can be seen in Fred's data when he mentioned in his second interview that "the answers are in the book." The probing question for the third interview would then be to ask Fred what he meant by this and why he thought it was important. The purpose of this interview was to focus on the participants' understanding of the experience of literacy in A.A. Here, meaning-making became the center of my attention as I attempted to draw out of each interviewee the 'why' behind their use of certain literacy practices.

Using this approach to interviewing, I gained the most evocative and compelling stories from my participants in relation to their literacy practices in A.A. Their responses revealed ample data about the ways in which literacy practices are enacted in A.A. and how these practices impact their identities and their lives. .

Construction of Life History

Once the interviews had been completed, they were transcribed verbatim. I also listened to each interview several times so that I could become more familiar with the data. The interviews were uploaded to my iPod and played repeatedly in every faction of my life (in the car, on the bus, while running or exercising, etc.). In addition, while I did do a good portion of the transcribing myself, I also paid for a transcription service for several of the interviews. I felt this was appropriate because I had listened to the audio of each interview so many times that I was confident in my grasp of the content of each person's data.

Following transcription, each interview was then analyzed several times for different data collection purposes. I did this "prepared to let the interview breathe and speak for itself" (Seidman, 1998, p.100). The first analysis looked to reveal any detail relating to a specific life event described by the participant. At times the participants recalled moments of their lives in exact sequential order. Other times, they bounced back and forth between the years. Therefore, a bulleted list was made of the events that were pulled from the transcripts to put them in chronological order. From there, I drafted a chronology for each participant. Like a narrative, a chronology is also a detailed telling of events over a specific period of time. However, a chronology does not include the author's point of view or perspective of the events. Narratives also make transparent the emotions and feelings of the interviewer and the interviewee (Chase, 2008). My emotions and my point of view were left out of each story to remain consistent with the

concept of a chronology. A chronology is a simple report, event by event, of a person's life. In some cases, chronology is synonymous with an oral history or life history. Though oral history is most often only referred to as the audio portion of the story, it "is historical in intent; that is, it seeks new knowledge about and insights into the past through an individual biography" (Shopes, 2011, p. 451). In this case, the historical context was the life span of each participant in the study and the new knowledge I hoped to uncover was how his or her literacy practice was used in sobriety. The other term, life history, often refers to the oral *and* written account of a person's life within a certain community setting, or their "life" as it may be (Chase, 2008, Kouritizin, 1999, Shopes, 2011). Regardless of term, the purpose of this step in the data analysis was to paint a picture of what life was like for each participant when they were drinking in order to exemplify how crucial literacy practice had become in sobriety. Through the process of in-depth interviewing, I was also able to flesh out this information, especially as it related to their literacy practice and identity within A.A.

In the case of all those interviewed, the events that were shared by each participant led up to the point in their life when they got sober. The life history is used to show the drastic change in behavior between the drinking alcoholic and the non-drinking alcoholic. For example, it would be difficult to imagine Robert speaking of listening as imperative to his life during the life-history portion of his chapter when he is discussing the turmoil of his disease. He only mentions his ability to listen once he was sober, even discussing how different it was for him to listen as a sober person after he had spent his

entire life up to that point not listening at all. This is a way of presenting an "insider's view of culture and daily life" (Chase, 2008, p. 61). Robert is an insider in A.A. and his chronology tells of the difference in the culture of literacy practice in his life between sobriety and his life before. This method of life history emphasizes Robert's understanding and memory of his own life events and how these events impacted him enough to get him sober and become prominent in the retelling of his life story (Kouritzin, 1999).

The intention of the second data analysis was to pull out any data *after* the participant got sober (got sober was the socially appropriate term in A.A. in contrast to became sober) that related to literacy using my definition of literacy as a sociocultural practice. To reiterate, this meant I pulled data from the transcripts that encompassed the way the participant used listening, speaking, reading and writing, to express their values, beliefs and identities. I looked for information where they used their interactions with others in order to gain knowledge, communicate, interpret, and make decisions specific to the social and cultural contexts of Alcoholics Anonymous. It wasn't just important for a participant to talk about reading *The Big Book*; it was also important for them to relate how they used the text with other people or as a social and cultural exercise. All of the data thus reflects how the participants use literacy from a sociocultural perspective in Alcoholics Anonymous. An example of this can be seen in Fred's data where he discusses how he uses *The Big Book* with his sponsees in the program. He talks about what pages they needed to read, how he often reads the text aloud with them, and how he

was instructed to use the book by oldtimers when he came into the program. Each of these examples aligned with my definition of literacy from a sociocultural perspective, and it was therefore pulled for further analysis.

This second analysis was completed in steps. First, the transcripts were highlighted anywhere the data was relevant to my definition of literacy. Second, the pieces were pulled from the transcript and placed into a new document that was printed, leaving space between each piece. Next, I cut the printed compilation of data into strips with each highlighted section having its own piece. The strips were then organized into themes by placing them on a large surface where they could be moved around, ordered and modified to create the best thematically organized data possible for each participant. I then moved each strip into an order that gave the best voice to the participant for that theme. In doing this, it appears in each chapter that the prominent theme for each participant was all said at once, therefore positioning the reader in a way so they can easily interpret the theme that is being projected by each participant. The idea for this step came from Lather (1997) who blended together different interviews from her HIV/AIDS study to position the reader as a thinker. She said, "Quotes from interview transcripts have sometimes been taken out of sequence and combined from across varied support groups for purpose of theme development, dramatic flow and to protect confidentiality" (Lather, 1997, p. xvii). While I did not take this step with the intention of protecting anonymity, I certainly organized my data in this way for thematic development and dramatic flow, and once this data was arranged in set themes, it was much easier to

work with. Once the themes had been appropriately organized, I cut/pasted them from the original transcripts into the order I had determined in the previously described process to give the participant the best voice. The data was then given to each participant to check for accuracy and to ensure that the compilation of the data into each theme truly represented what the individual had hoped to convey. The final step was to perform a discourse analysis of each theme for each participant, which is described below.

Discourse Analysis

This dissertation is a study of how literacy practices exists in the language, identity and Discourse of alcoholics in the social setting of A.A. Because of the social and cultural nature of the context of this study, and because it relates directly to language use within it, discourse analysis was the best method available for analyzing the data gathered during the interviews. Gee (2009) sees Discourse as:

> composed of distinctive ways of speaking/listening and often, too, writing/reading *coupled* with distinctive ways of acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, dressing, thinking, believing, with other people and with various objects, tools, and technologies, so as to enact specific socially recognizable identities engaged in specific socially recognizable activities (p. 155, sic).

Using Gee's approach to discourse analysis gave me the opportunity to investigate how each participant was using language to communicate the social and cultural ties that literacy had to Alcoholics Anonymous. Because of the way the data was collected, I was able to focus completely on spoken communication as the participants

shared about their literacy practice as it related to their sobriety. Once the data had been organized by theme and condensed into a manageable size (there were originally over 200 pages of transcripts), I performed two levels of discourse analysis on each piece. First, I wrote the name and a short summary of Gee's twenty-seven tools for discourse analysis tools on notecards (Gee, 2011). Each tool provided several explicit questions to as of the data as I re-read each theme. For example, when using the situated meaning tool, I asked what words or phrases the participant used that were related only to the context of A.A., and which would not be understood by an outsider. I therefore went through all of the data one time for each tool asking specific questions for each tool and thus analyzing it in this first level a total of twenty-seven different times. In some cases, the use of a tool was overwhelmingly irrelevant to the data. Other tools were only a mediocre gauge of discourse analysis. At the end of this process, however, it was evident that six specific tools would be most relevant to this study. They included: the deictic tool, the fill-in tool, the situated meaning tool, the significance-building tool, the identities building tool and the big "D" discourse tool. Below is a summary of the function of each of the six tools that were deemed the most relevant to the study.

Discourse Analysis Tool	Function of the Tool
Deixis Tool	Identifies how deictic words allow the listener or reader to draw inferences about the meaning of a communication. Ex: he, she, they, them, it, you, etc.
Fill-In Tool	Considers the language that needs to be clarified in order for the listener to decipher the meaning of words in the context of the interviews.
Situated Meaning Tool	Examines the language that is specific to the context in which something is said, in this case interviews about Alcoholics Anonymous. Ex: carry the message, the 4th step, moral inventory, etc.
Significance Building Tool	Explores how language is used to make some part of the topics discussed during the interviews more or less significant than other parts.
Identity Building Tool	Investigates how the speaker positions their identities as related to the specific social or cultural setting of A.A. and how these identities are valued or devalued. Ex: alcoholic, sponsor, newcomer, oldtimer, etc.
Big 'D' Discourse Analysis Tool	Identifies how the speaker uses language, behavior, beliefs, and interactions to engage in Alcoholics Anonymous and enact the identity of a sober member of this community.

Figure 5: A chart of the six tools used to complete the discourse analysis of this study. (Gee, 2011).

The deictic tool was used to pull out the deictic words used in each thematic data set to provide clarity. Deictics "tie speech and writing to context" in a way that someone within a conversation can understand what a speaker is saying, but someone outside of it could not (Gee, 2011, p.10). An example of this is the use of the word *they*. Every participant in this study used this word in a different way, some using it to reference oldtimers, others to speak of sponsors. The use of the deictic tool clarifies what *they* means is a specific context, or, in this case, the interview.

The second tool, the fill-in tool, was also used to build clarity in the data. This tool forced me to identify any assumptions the speaker was making about my understanding. For example when Robert said listening was "key" for him, it was important to clarify what this meant. Key is not a deictic word, but Robert assumed I knew what he meant because I am an insider in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. Therefore, I used the fill-in tool to analyze the context of this usage, and convey its meaning to the reader.

The situated-meaning tool also works in this way, but in this case the words analyzed are specific language of A.A. Words like 'oldtimer' and 'sponsor' hold a specialized meaning in A.A. that can only be understood by other A.A. members. Again, for clarity, this tool was used to convey meaning of language to the reader.

The significance building tool is used to analyze how the participant builds up or lessens the importance of some topic or issue in the data set. This is the way each person makes things either "trivial or important" (Gee, 2011, p. 92). Fred made it very clear

through his language use that the book was very important to him, especially in terms of sponsorship. He used specific language like ‘good’ and ‘better’ to describe certain aspects of A.A. These words made the topic he was discussing at the time more important than other topics.

In a way, the identities building tool also works in this way. The participants each used specific language to position themselves within the context of A.A. At times, they were newcomers; at others they were oldtimers. They were also sponsors, sponsees, Big Book Thumpers, and everything in between. Their identities were made known by the ways they talked about themselves in program.

Finally, the big “D” Discourse tool allowed me to investigate how each participant acted as a member within the social and cultural context of A.A. A capital ‘D’ is used in Discourse here because the Discourse being discussed is specific to one social group in one specific setting. This tool looks at not only how the participants talked about A.A. but also how they acted about it. Were they humble? Arrogant? Spiritual? This tool permitted me to go beyond the language use of the participants and look at their behaviors, values and habits within the group as well.

These tools were applicable to all data, no matter which participant or theme was being analyzed. They also lent themselves well to investigating literacy from a sociocultural perspective in Alcoholics Anonymous. Gee encourages this process of analysis, saying, “For some data, some tools will yield more illuminating information

than for other data. But they are all meant to be asked of each piece of data" (Gee, 2011, p. x). This rationalizes the two-step process I used in completing the discourse analysis.

The next step was to pursue a deep analysis of the data using each of the six tools that had been determined as the most appropriate. I completed this step by reading each thematic set of data individually and annotating where each tool could be applicable. I did this three times for each set, paying close attention to not only phrases that could be analyzed, but also individual words. Through this process, I referred back to Gee's text (2011) to ensure I was using the tool properly and meticulously. I was especially interested in how each participant communicated their literacy use in Alcoholics Anonymous during the interviews. For example, Janis spoke often of using writing to make her "feel better" and had a strong desire to begin writing again now that she had reached one year of sobriety. Upon completion of these deep analyses, I wrote the discussion of findings for each thematic data set within each chapter. This completed the first draft of this dissertation.

Upon revising and editing the first draft, I became aware of the insurmountable presence of academic language and conventions within it. Although this is a dissertation, these conventions were contradictory to the second purpose of this study which intends to make this study available and understandable to anyone seeking or in recovery. Therefore, the process of completing the second draft was comprised mostly of removing academic conventions in order to direct the discussion of findings for each participant to not only the academic, but also to the alcoholic. The usefulness of the information

contained herein had to appeal to both the academic population and the recovery community. In order to be consistent with this dual purpose, I made drastic changes to the verbiage and organization of this dissertation in the second draft. This meant that large portions of the discourse analysis, while an important part of the process, were removed from the final publication. It became clear that the layperson reading this study in hopes of finding answers about how to stay sober would not be interested in terminology like deictics, nor would it help such an individual comprehend how literacy could play a role in sobriety. Thus to captivate both audiences, these academic conventions were largely removed.

Validity/Reliability

This study was not proposed to present one truth about literacy use in Alcoholics Anonymous. Rather, based on the stories of Robert, Fred and Janis, it was intended to make obvious how three members of Alcoholics Anonymous have utilized literacy practices, and how these practices could be translated across other members of the group. The use of in-depth interviewing thus makes the purpose of this study valid and reliable. "As a method of inquiry, interviewing is most consistent with people's ability to make meaning through language. It affirms the importance of the individual without denigrating the possibility of community and collaboration" (Seidman, 1998, p. 8). The stories of the three participants in this dissertation were useful for establishing and supporting literacy in Alcoholics Anonymous with the purpose mentioned above taken into consideration. This is evident in Robert's discussion of listening where he

emphasizes how crucial the oldtimers were to his sobriety from the very beginning. It is also seen in Fred's story about Big Book Thumpers, and how this terminology is used across the program. Janis' story about journaling and reflecting on her writing is also important in the ways she used it to learn about A.A. The stories of these three participants exemplify the use and promotion of literacy in Alcoholics Anonymous.

Member-checking was also used to increase the reliability and validity of this study. Each participant was given their chronology to review, edit and adjust as they felt necessary. They were especially instructed to make changes anywhere they felt the information had been portrayed inaccurately or in a way that made them feel vulnerable. This also helped to maintain the anonymity of the participants of the study. The participants were also given a copy of their data sets (referred to as themes within the study) to ensure that the data that had been pulled from the entire transcript was a true representation of what they were really trying to communicate in the interviews. Though they were given their chronology and their theme, the participants were informed that I reserved the right to compose the findings of the analysis in the best way possible to present the data I deemed important from this study, a parameter to which they all agreed.

Gee also explicitly outlines how his theory of discourse analysis is valid through convergence, agreement, coverage and linguistic details. Convergence was used in this study through the use of deep analysis on two levels. Every tool was used to analyze the data, and six tools were determined to be the most relevant. These six tools converge in a way that illuminates the Discourse of literacy practice in A.A. Agreement of this data is

present in the fact that the specialist language used within is language that would be used by members of the A.A. Discourse community. Due to the already existing structures of storytelling, or qualifying, in A.A. the six discourse analysis tools that were the most relevant to this study could also be applied to other oral histories in A.A., thus giving this study solid coverage. Finally, the use of the deictic tool as one of the methods of analysis ties this study to the linguistic structure of language and how it is used in A.A. More specifically, it shows how language functions to interconnect literacy practice and the program of Alcoholics Anonymous (Gee, 2011).

Limitations

There were two major limitations to this study. First, the study was conducted using a relatively small sample size. In the final version, only three participants were included. While this did limit the scope of the study, it also allowed for a deep and thorough analysis of the lives and literacy use of each person. However, "the method of in-depth, phenomenological interviewing applied to a sample of participants who all experience similar structural and social conditions gives enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants" (Seidman, 1998, p. 48). As a result, the focus of this study is in fact on the stories of each participant and how these conveyed literacy use in Alcoholics Anonymous.

A second limitation occurred in that only one meeting at one Alano club was used to recruit participants. Due to the unique format of this explicit meeting, it is possible that the literacy practices the participants exhibited were as much a result of the specific

meeting as they were to their overall membership within Alcoholics Anonymous. However, with the intention of such a small sample size in mind from the initial proposal of this study, there would have been no justifiable reason to recruit from additional meetings in the area of the large southwestern city where the meeting studied took place, especially considering that over 300 meetings occur each day in said metropolis. In addition, limiting the sample to one specific meeting allowed for less discrepancy in the format and Discourse that may have occurred if multiple meeting locations had been used. This preliminary study needed to be conducted before further research, particularly any research outside of the area of this large southwestern city, could be warranted.